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**‘Nailed to the rolls of honour, crucified’: Irish literary responses to the Great War.**

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**Submitted for the award of PhD.**

**University of Warwick, English Department.**

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This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

### **Abstract.**

The aim of this thesis is to explore the war writings of Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O’Flaherty, working class, Roman Catholic Irishmen, all of whom fought in the trenches as privates and who, collectively, it is argued here, constitute a distinct trio of war writers. Through considerations of class, camaraderie, violence, religion, trauma and the body, and engaging with scholars such as John Fordham, David Taylor and Sarah Cole, this thesis will consider these Irish soldiers within a cultural, social and historical context. Central to this examination is the idea that the motives for enlistment and the experience of army labour and even combat was such that military service was perceived as work rather than a duty or vocation undertaken in support of any prevailing doctrines of patriotism or sacrifice. For these Irishmen their enlistment was a form of emigration for work and their resulting exploration of national and personal identity encompasses ideas of home as exile, building upon the work of Clair Wills, and a sense of continuity for such working class individuals between peacetime and wartime roles. The men’s Catholicism also shaped their aesthetic and philosophical responses to the war, even while the war conversely troubled their faith or confirmed their religious skepticism. With these ideas in mind, the war writing of these men will be located within both an Irish and a pan-European literary working class tradition, thereby permitting the texts to be viewed within a wider context than literature of the First World War, and from a perspective that goes beyond Ireland and Britain. These characteristics shape a perspective on the conflict very different from that of the canonical officer-writers, men such as Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves or Edmund Blunden, whose work will be considered alongside those of the three Irish soldier-writers.



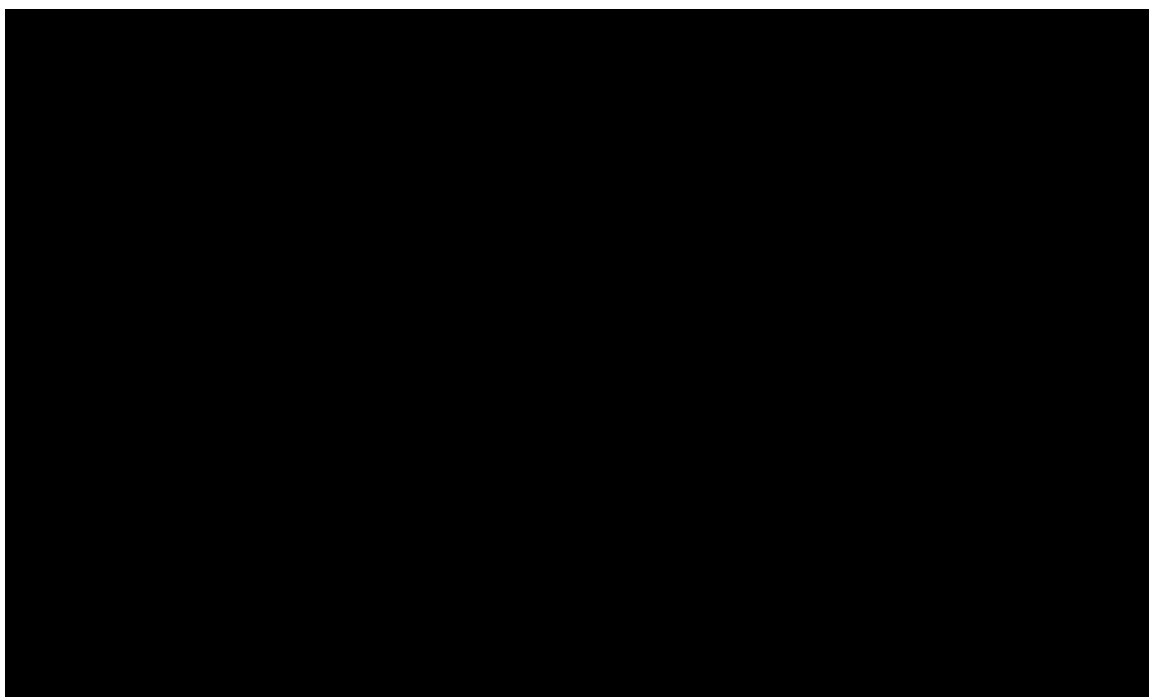
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## **Introduction**

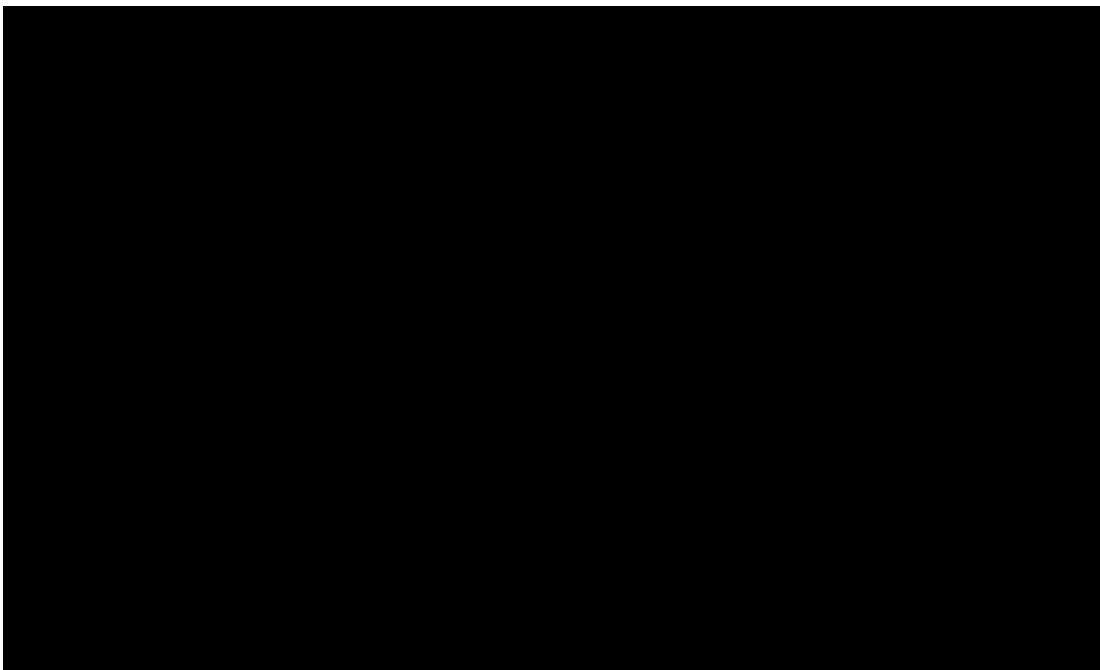
In the autumn of 2015 the National Library of Ireland in Dublin curated an exhibition entitled 'Portraits of the Invisible: faces of Irish men and women from WW1', in which photographs of individuals connected to the conflict were put on display for the first time. There were portraits of nurses, sailors, airmen and officers - all of whom had an involvement in the war - but there was one photograph in particular whose subject matter resonates with the concerns of this thesis: a group of thirteen soldiers, all serving in the ranks, all dressed untidily in items of army uniform, such as the rough woollen undershirts issued to privates (Figure One).

A number of the men give the appearance of being something other than soldiers. There is none of the parade ground polish often associated with troops, no bright buttons, no creased trousers, no standing to attention. In this photograph many of the men give the impression of being labourers rather than combatants: two individuals each hold a ramrod, an article used to clean the barrels of weapons; their faces lined with black dirt. The men seem to have been undertaking some form of hard manual work and as such there appears to be a blurring of two roles, both of which are central to this thesis: the labourer and the soldier.



**Figure One**

In fact, one might compare this image to another one depicting nineteenth century Irish railway navvies (Figure Two). There exudes from both photographs a palpable sense of physicality as each group relied upon strength to complete manual tasks. These men stand in a railway cutting, a space similar in form to that of a frontline trench, and the clothing they are wearing - shirts that are identical to the soldiers, together with their moleskin trousers - give the suggestion of a uniform. Indeed one of the Irish writers to be considered in this thesis, Patrick MacGill, wrote in his novel *Moleskin Joe* (1915) of a navvy who enlisted: '[we] were going to change uniform, khaki for moleskin, and puttees for knee-straps, supplant the shovels with the sword, the pick-axe with the rifle'.<sup>1</sup> This exchange will recur throughout the thesis as infantry soldiers, on regular occasions, were required to substitute a shovel or pick-axe for a weapon.



**Figure Two.**

The '[ex]change' described by MacGill's character Moleskin Joe extended to more than appearance and manual work: navvies and soldiers were groups estranged from polite society, occupying spaces separated from those other than their own. Again reference can be

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Moleskin Joe* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1923), p. 15.

made to Patrick MacGill, this time his war memoir *The Great Push* (1916) in which he writes: ‘The battle-line is a secret world, a world of curses. The guilty secrecy of war is shrouded in lies, and shielded by bloodstained swords; to know it you must be one of those who wage it, a party to dark and mysterious orgies of carnage’.<sup>1</sup> Two years previously, in his semi-autobiographical novel *Children of the Dead End* (1914), MacGill had described how, as a navvy, he had been ‘an outcast, a man rejected by society, and despised and forgotten’.<sup>2</sup> It is recognised here that the idea of ‘secrecy’ is different from that of the ‘outcast’, but both terms are suggestive of a degree of separation from ‘society’. This notion of separation based upon experience such as highlighted here by MacGill is a recurring theme throughout the war writing of each of the three Irish soldier-writers considered in this thesis: Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O’Flaherty.

Similarities between the two groups are perhaps not that surprising. As Timothy Bowman noted in his *Irish Regiments in the Great War*, of the soldiers recruited into Irish divisions from Ireland those men in the ranks ‘appear to have come from less varied social backgrounds than their counterparts in Great Britain; [many] were labourers [and/or] unskilled workers’.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, as Thomas Dooley stated in his *Irishmen or English Soldiers?*: ‘[u]nskilled men had traditionally provided the bulk of recruits for the army [...] It was this same class of people who filled the ranks of Kitchener’s New Armies in Ireland [...] the urban poorer classes filled the ranks of the Irish regiments’.<sup>4</sup> Both photographs above depict groups of working-class men, the military platoon and the navvy gang, and there is apparent in each image a sense of camaraderie rooted in shared experiences. From this

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1916), Foreword.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2005), p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Bowman, *Irish Regiments in the Great War: Discipline and Morale* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Dooley, *Irishmen or English Soldiers?* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), pp.4-5.

emerges a sense of collective identity, a bond rooted in the hardships, privations and brutality that they endured: it is the exploration of such ideas that underpins this thesis.

The image of the soldiers, indeed all figures within the exhibition, could be viewed by some, even to this day, as contentious. The collection is entitled 'the Invisible', a term replete with significance, as it begs the question: in relation to Irish history to whom did such men become 'Invisible'? It was surely not the families, as they have been the custodians of the photographs. It could have been that Irish soldiers were unseen by the British military establishment. Despite there being a plethora of regiments from Ireland - the Connaught Rangers, the South Irish Horse or the Royal Irish Rifles to name but three - as Keith Jeffrey wrote in his *Ireland and the Great War* there were many more Irishmen, precise number unknown, 'who joined units in Britain, the empire or the U.S.A.'.<sup>1</sup> Each of the three Irish soldier-writers considered in this thesis enlisted with regiments based outside of Ireland, Patrick MacGill and Liam O'Flaherty in London, James Hanley in Canada. They therefore joined the ranks of soldiers who largely fell out of Irish history.

There is, however, another explanation of the word 'Invisible', one that connects with a term coined by F.X. Martin in his '1916 – Myth, Fact, and Fiction': Ireland's 'national amnesia'<sup>2</sup> in relation to the conflict. Irish Catholics who fought for the British in World War One have, to an extent, been 'Invisible' since 1918, doubly marginalised, lost to public gaze due to political circumstances in Ireland resulting in a degree of disengagement with the conflict. In the interwar era many Irish veterans of the war suffered hardships, ostracism and intimidation from some within the republican community. This thesis offers one further reason as to why Irish Catholic soldiers were 'Invisible': the relative paucity of Irish accounts

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Jeffrey, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> F.X. Martin, '1916 – Myth, Fact, and Fiction' in *Studia Hibernica*, No. 7 (1967), p. 68.

is in contrast to the proliferation of texts written by other British soldiers, particularly men from a certain social milieu and role within the army, the officers.

It is not only Irish soldiers who were marginalised. Men enlisted from countries such as India and the British Dominions – Canada, Australia, Newfoundland, New Zealand and South Africa - in order to fight for the Empire. Some, however, found there to be a great deal of prejudice toward their presence in uniform. As Timothy C. Winegard stated in his *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War* ‘public opinion accepted that certain identifiable ethnic groups lacked the intelligence and integrity to fight a modern war’.<sup>1</sup> Indian officers, for example, who were known as ‘Viceroy’s Commissioned Officers’ (VCOs) had the right of command only over Indian troops, not British. Indeed VCOs ‘were subordinate to all officers who held the King’s Commission’ almost all of whom were British.<sup>2</sup> The notion of the subaltern subject was transposed from British colonial India and into the trenches of France. As David Omissi outlines in his *Indian Voices of the Great War*, ‘[Indian regiments] were normally either of ‘class’ or ‘class-company’ type. The men of class regiments were all of the same caste and religion’.<sup>3</sup> This notion of separation predicated upon religion also took place in Ireland as, for example, the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division recruited men mainly from protestant Belfast while the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division did so from Roman Catholic areas in Ireland.

This idea of religious segregation, to a degree, extended to Irishmen in uniform. As Myles Dungan stated in his *Irish Voices From The Great War*, regarding the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers, while the Non-Commissioned Officers and the men in the ranks were Irish, ‘[they were] led by British officers’.<sup>4</sup> This notion is expanded upon by Timothy

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy C. Winegard, *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers’ Letters, 1914-1918* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), p. xxii.

<sup>4</sup> Myles Dungan, *Irish Voices From The Great War* (Dublin and Portland: Irish Academic Press, 1998), p. 36.

Bowman who stated in *Irish Regiments in The Great War* that of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division ‘[s]carcely one officer in five was a Catholic and of the officers above the rank of major, only one was not protestant’.<sup>1</sup> This highlights the marginalisation of Irishmen generally and Roman Catholic soldiers specifically in relation to positions of responsibility within the British army during the First World War. A situation that may have contributed to Irish veterans of the conflict becoming ‘Invisible’ upon their demobilisation.

### **The Irish Soldier-Writers**

Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O’Flaherty could all have been included in the National Library’s photograph because, like the men pictured, each served during the Great War as privates in the army. In addition there are further links between the two images and at least one of the writers: Patrick MacGill, born in Glenties, County Donegal, Ireland on 24 December 1894, worked as a child labourer on farms in Ireland before emigrating to Scotland to undertake work as a navvy and later as a journalist. In 1914 MacGill enlisted with the London Irish Rifles.

One aspect of James Hanley’s life that remains uncertain is his birth, both in terms of the location and date. John Fordham in *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class* states that the author was born in Dublin on 3 September 1901.<sup>2</sup> On his ‘Attestation Paper’, however, signed by Hanley upon his enlistment into the Canadian army, he stated that he was born in ‘Liverpool, England [on] 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 1898’.<sup>3</sup> Although James Hanley certainly spent his formative years in Liverpool, with his Irish parents, Ireland remained central to his sense of identity. At the age of thirteen Hanley ran away to sea, working as a labourer in the engine rooms of merchant ships before enlisting in Canada as an infantryman.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Bowman, *Irish Regiments in the Great War* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), p. i.

<sup>3</sup> James Hanley, [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) [Accessed 14 July 2010].

It is relevant for this thesis to note that Hanley's father, prior to working as a merchant marine stoker, was a 'printer/proof reader', while his mother had received, as John Fordham noted, a 'sound Ursuline education'.<sup>1</sup> As such one could suggest that Hanley's heritage was lower-middle rather than working class. However, the Hanley family moved to Liverpool to find work, sliding down the social scale, a decline that, as Irish émigrés, brought the Hanleys face to face with British imperialist and racist social relations in a working class environment. As John Fordham stated, it was 'the move to Liverpool [that] produced an effect of 'proletarianization''<sup>2</sup>; a position that informed James Hanley's war writing.

Liam O'Flaherty, the son of a tenant farmer, was born into extreme poverty on 28 August 1896 on the Aran Islands, off Ireland's west coast. O'Flaherty eventually moved to Dublin to study for the priesthood but left prior to his ordination: in 1915 he joined the Irish Guards. Each of these three Irishmen fought in France, two in regiments whose identities were closely linked to Ireland, and all were wounded - in the case of Liam O'Flaherty sustaining minor physical, but lifelong psychological, injuries. MacGill, Hanley and O'Flaherty all experienced manual labour and hardship, both in and out of the army, and viewed the war through the lens of the distinctive personal and group identity that this background produced.

In this thesis the war writing of three Irish working-class writers will be examined: Patrick MacGill's memoirs *The Amateur Army* (1914), *The Red Horizon* (1915) and *The Great Push* (1916), together with his novels *The Brown Brethren* (1917) and *Fear!* (1921). Reference is also made to his play *Suspense* (1923), a work located in the trenches, and two poems, 'A Lament' and 'A Soldier's Prayer', both from *Soldier Songs* (1916), his only collection of wartime poetry. James Hanley's novella *The German Prisoner* (1931), followed

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<sup>1</sup> John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 12.



by the short story 'Narrative' (1931) and the novel *Our Time is Gone* (1941), will then be considered. Hanley also wrote of the war in *Hollow Sea* (1938), a work that portrays the experiences of wartime merchant seamen, but it will not be considered as similar material contextually is in *Our Time is Gone*. Liam O'Flaherty produced three works that depicted the First World War, or an individual connected with the conflict, and each will be examined: a short story 'The Alien Skull' (1927), alongside the novels *Return of the Brute* (1929) and *The Black Soul* (1924).

There were other Irishmen who wrote of their wartime experiences, writers who had a certain cultural visibility such as Thomas MacGreevy, Thomas 'Tom' Kettle and Francis Ledwidge, all of whom shared similar wartime experiences having enlisted as privates; MacGreevy and Kettle went on to serve as officers. MacGreevey survived the war but Ledwidge was killed at Passchendale, Kettle on the Somme.

Thomas MacGreevy's experiences in France informed his work both directly, such as his war poem 'De Cicitate Hominum', and indirectly as references to the conflict emerge in poems such as 'Golders Green', 'Seventh Gift of the Holy Ghost' and 'Gloria de Carlos V', to name but three. In his poetry MacGreevy touched upon the political and personal toll the conflict had taken within him, having become not only disillusioned by war but also alarmed by Britain's treatment of Ireland.

Tom Kettle was described by Terry Phillips in her 'Enigmas of the Great War: Thomas Kettle and Francis Ledwidge', as a politician who wrote poetry; he had been a Westminster M.P.<sup>1</sup> As a war poet Kettle primarily wrote of political issues that surrounded warfare, such as in 'A Song of the Irish Armies', a poem informed by his Catholicism and in which Kettle expressed the view that the outbreak of war was necessary in order to counter

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Phillips, 'Enigmas of the Great War: Thomas Kettle and Francis Ledwidge', *Irish Studies Review* (16:4 2008), p. 386.

evil. For Tom Kettle, however, the war was an act of last resort: Kettle viewed the conflict as a political opportunity, as helping Britain could potentially secure Home Rule in Ireland.

Francis Ledwidge, who served in the ranks, is described by Terry Phillips as being the converse to Tom Kettle, 'a poet before he was a politician'.<sup>1</sup> In his war poem 'At Currabwee' Ledwidge expresses the view that his reason for enlistment was not the justice of the Empire's cause but rather the political gains to be made for Ireland by fighting in the British army. In this work he claims his inheritance as an Irish patriot, suggesting that his role fighting for the Empire in the Dardanelles or Macedonia advanced Ireland's cause for self-determination as much as did the activities of Padraig Pearse and Thomas MacDonagh on the streets of Dublin in 1916. In his war poetry Ledwidge expressed the exhilaration of soldiering but also registers, at times, a disillusionment with the conflict. The reasons for not focusing in detail upon the works of these writers in this thesis are two-fold: on the one-hand both men's experiences in France were predominantly as officers, not private soldiers, and all three wrote poetry, not prose.

The Irish poet and author William Monk Gibbon also wrote of his wartime experiences. Born into a Protestant family, he was educated privately in Dublin before going up to Keble College, Oxford. Gibbon details his army service as an officer in his memoir *Inglorious Soldier* (1968) describing how, while on leave in 1916, he was involved in suppressing the Easter Rising. Having spoken with one particular prisoner, Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, moments before Skeffington's summary execution at the hands of a British officer, Gibbon changed his view of the conflict, culminating in his becoming a pacifist. Gibbon was later posted to France and, although he came under enemy fire, did not serve in the trenches.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

Gibbon's autobiography is not discussed in this thesis because he was an officer and did not experience life in the frontline. Nonetheless, one comment he made is apposite to this consideration of Irish working-class soldiers: 'I read Patrick Magill's (*sic*) *The Red Horizon* and *The Great Push*, perhaps the first books to delineate the protagonists on the western front as they actually were'.<sup>1</sup> The degree of realism about the war present in MacGill's writing, and that of James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty, is a thread that runs throughout the following chapters.

Another Irishman, John Lucy, whose text *There's a Devil in the Drum* (1938) details his wartime experiences, is also worthy of comment in the context of this discussion. Lucy, born in Cork in 1895, was Catholic, working-class and a professional soldier; he joined the Royal Irish Rifles on 3 January 1912. On the outbreak of war John Lucy was a corporal before rising to the rank of Sergeant when, in 1917, he applied for and received a commission. Lucy survived the war, returning again to France in 1940 as an army officer. In this broad outline it would appear that Lucy's memoir would be highly relevant to this thesis - yet the text is predominantly factual, detailing military incidents, rather than opinion, and it is for this reason that it is not being considered in detail.

### **The Political Situation In Ireland**

There is an aspect of the wartime political context within Ireland that is important to this thesis. This is enlistment, as each of the three Irish soldier-writers to be considered were volunteers. Estimates vary as to how many Irishmen fought, or were killed, in the First World War. However, Keith Jeffrey provides a figure of 140,460 recruits and the number of deaths anywhere between 25,000 and 49,000.<sup>2</sup> Unlike in Britain conscription was never instituted within Ireland; and as such, all Irishmen who served did so of their own volition.

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<sup>1</sup> Monk Gibbon, *Inglorious Soldier* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Keith Jeffrey, *Ireland and the Great War*, pp. 7 and 35.

This point is important because it raises a question: why did they join-up? This thesis will argue that for Irishmen such as MacGill, Hanley and O'Flaherty the war was but a means of employment.

There is no single explanation as to why any Irishman enlisted. Although their Catholicism arguably put the writers examined in this thesis at a distance from the war, the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland actually called for men to volunteer, linking the conflict to religious duty; as Jerome aan de Wiel stated in his *The Catholic Church in Ireland 1914-1918*: 'The phrase 'poor little Catholic Belgium' would often be heard or read during the first years of the war. The aim of the phrase was simple: Irishmen should identify themselves with the Belgians so that recruitment would be stimulated'.<sup>1</sup>

The Catholic Church's position was multifaceted: support for the British Empire was encouraged in order that Irish Home Rule could ultimately be achieved while the Church in Ireland also castigated what it viewed as a 'ruthless barbaric' and Protestant Germany.<sup>2</sup> Politics and religion were intertwined in the Church's initial support of the conflict. Ironically, however, the Catholicism of the writers in question estranged them to some extent from the side on which they fought and, as will be discussed in this thesis, encouraged pan-European fellow feeling that extended to the purported enemy.

The complexity of the environment surrounding Irishmen's involvement in the British army during the First World War, particularly those who were Roman Catholic, cannot be underestimated. Sir Roger Casement, a prominent Protestant Irish Nationalist who had been knighted by the Crown for services as a civil servant and who was executed by the British for treason as a member of the Irish Volunteers, and for his campaign of 'de-Anglicising' Ireland, stated that nothing 'truly Irish [could] survive ... free entry into the British army' and

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<sup>1</sup> Jerome aan de Wiel, *The Catholic Church in Ireland 1914-1918: War and Politics* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

that such combatants were ‘not Irishmen but English soldiers [and] more English than the English themselves’.<sup>1</sup> Casement’s opinion simplifies a position that is far more multi-layered than the absolute distinction between the Irish good and the British bad he implies. This thesis will consider how the writing of the three Irish working class soldiers examined here demonstrates a different perspective of the war to those of the officer-writers, in part due to the Irishmen’s ambiguous relationship to the conflict. The overarching chronology of the texts considered in this thesis, from the infantry training of MacGill in 1914 to post-armistice O’Flaherty, permits one to view key historical moments, such as Casement’s statement, in light of the Irish soldier-writer’s literary output. To re-appropriate Casement’s statement, MacGill, Hanley and O’Flaherty were both ‘Irishmen [and] English soldiers’.

One man who saw no difficulty with Irishmen serving in the British army was the Irishman John Redmond M.P. who called on National Volunteers to join Irish regiments of the British army in order to support the war effort. He, like the Church, believed that to do so would aid the implementation of Ireland’s Home Rule following the Armistice. In his speech of 20 September 1914 made at Woodenbridge, to East Wicklow Volunteers, Redmond asserted that each recruit should ‘account for [them]selves as men, not only in Ireland itself, but wherever the firing line extends in defence of right, of freedom and religion in this war’. Redmond went on to state that ‘[y]our duty is, at all costs, to defend the shores of Ireland from foreign invasion. It is a duty more than that of taking care that Irish valour proves itself on the field of war, as it has always proved itself in the past.’<sup>2</sup> Redmond’s linking of ‘Irish valour’ with the war is significant for this thesis, as Liam O’Flaherty’s novel *The Black Soul* connects an ex-soldier’s return to post-1918 Ireland with the country’s martial ‘past’.

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Casement quoted in Thomas Dooley, *Irishmen or English Soldiers*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> John Redmond, ‘Speech at Woodenbridge’, [www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/redmond](http://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/redmond) [Accessed 16/03/2017].

Some Irishmen may have volunteered to escape a personal difficulty or to travel and experience adventure while for others the primary motivator may have been financial. The British army paid, fed and clothed many men who were either unemployed or earning very low wages and living in slum-like conditions in cities such as Dublin. Further, the family of soldiers killed in action received a pension, and thus to fight for the British Empire made financial sense to many working class men for whom pre-war life was an economic struggle.

The financial motive that can be discerned in the turn to writing war literature by MacGill, Hanley and, to an extent O'Flaherty, complicates in interesting and sometimes problematic ways their contribution to an alternative First World War canon. Arguably they were more clear-eyed about the conflict, in some ways detached from the views that underpinned Britain's involvement in its prosecution, but it also contributed to contradictions in the position of at least one of the subjects of this thesis: Patrick MacGill was at times in his memoirs daring in his critique of a conflict that was still under way but he also wrote propaganda for the British government. The tensions in MacGill's identity that came with being both a working class labourer, a novelist, a private and an author were magnified in these different identities in his writings, which will be examined at more length in the course of the thesis.

It is appropriate at this point to consider the political context into which the works of Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty were published. In Ireland in the years leading up to 1916 and the Easter Rising there was an undercurrent of radical nationalism that came to the fore on the streets of Dublin. Although there were some Irish men and women - Pádraig Pearse for example - who believed that Ireland should be made free from British rule, there were many others who were not so supportive. As Timothy Coogan stated in his *Ireland Since the Rising*, '[a]t the time its occurred, the Rising in Easter Week 1916 was the most unpopular event in Dublin since the arrival of Oliver Cromwell'. The level of

antagonism toward men who had taken part in the rebellion was such that, as they were led by British soldiers through the city's streets to boats bound for England and imprisonment, '[y]ells of abuse and disgust were flung at them from the crowds watching them pass'. One year later attitudes had changed because when some of the men returned they were met with 'a surging welcome from the same Dublin crowds'.<sup>1</sup> Thus in the year during which Patrick MacGill's memoir *The Great Push* was published a rebellion had taken place and been suppressed in his home country with opinion for its occurrence shifting from opposition to support, predicated in part upon Britain's execution of the revolt's leaders.

The decade that followed the Rising, and it was during this period in which Patrick MacGill wrote *Fear!*, James Hanley *The German Prisoner* and Liam O'Flaherty *Return of the Brute* and *The Black Soul*, saw the War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. The War of Independence took place between 1919 and 1921 and its aim was for Irish nationalists was the removal of British security forces from Ireland. It was initiated by a small group of republican volunteers who became the Irish Republican Army. British government property was attacked as were members of the Royal Irish Constabulary with reprisals taking place against those found to have carried out, or provided support to, such actions. Sinn Fein supported the IRA campaign with Michael Collins, a figure pivotal to both the Irish government and the Republicans providing a co-ordinating role. Ambushes, targeted assassinations and other acts designed to disrupt British rule were carried out by the IRA but by 1921 Sinn Fein was in negotiations with the British government. On 6 December 1921 an Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed between the two parties which set up the Irish Free State, an entity that Timothy Coogan described as 'a self-governing dominion of the British Empire'.<sup>2</sup> What then followed was the Irish Civil War.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Coogan, *Ireland Since the Rising* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The Anglo-Irish treaty effectively confirmed Partition with the Irish Free State in the South while Ulster in the north remained part of the United Kingdom. The Civil War was fought between two supporters of the Provisional government who wanted the Treaty implemented while it was opposed by the Republicans. The conflict, which lasted nearly eleven months, was fought in the main as a guerrilla war with the Republicans, on one occasion seizing the Four Courts in Dublin: Liam O’Flaherty, it is believed, was one of their number.

The Civil War ended on the 24 May 1923 when Eamon de Valera issued a proclamation that included the words: ‘The Republic can no longer be defended successfully by your arms [...] Military victory must be allowed to rest for the moment with those who have destroyed the Republic’.<sup>1</sup> The three Irish soldier-writers whose texts are examined in this thesis wrote of, and published, their experiences as members of the British army against this backdrop of political instability and turmoil within Ireland using publishing companies in England, and not in their home country, to have their works released.

### **Working Class Identity**

One aspect shared by Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O’Flaherty was that each was a member of the working class, those in Marx and Engels’ words, from *The Communist Manifesto*, who ‘[had] no means of production of their own’ and were ‘reduced to selling their labour power in order to live’.<sup>2</sup> The phrase ‘working-class writing’, rather than proletarian, will be used throughout the thesis to refer to the work of each of the Irish soldier-writers. As Carole Snee has argued in her ‘Working-Class Literature or Proletarian Writing?’, the term proletarian writing ‘suggests an awareness of class as a primary determinant, which is not always present’. In contrast, working-class writing ‘attempts to

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<sup>1</sup> Eamon de Valera, quoted in John A. Murray, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 219.



bring into the centre of the arena the life experience of that class, and there is a recognition within the texts, sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit, that that experience is different from the traditional subject-matter of literature'.<sup>1</sup> The crucial element in each of the texts to be considered is the extent to which they all portray 'the life experience of that class' in the circumstances of, and surrounding, the First World War.

At this point it is appropriate to consider the class structure of Britain during the time the three Irish soldiers were writing their war texts. One of the means by which British society has been described was, as David Cannadine stated in his *Class in Britain*, as being 'triadic, which divided [society] into three collective constituencies, usually upper, middle and lower [classes]'.<sup>2</sup> The upper class are considered to be those with a peerage, gentry and hereditary landowners while the middle class can be divided into three sections: lower, middle and upper. The divisions are primarily based upon one's occupation: lower would include those who are employed in an office, for example as a clerk, middle would typically have a career in accountancy or medicine while the upper-middle class broadly consists of those who were born into families who possess high income and are traditionally educated at independent, or public, schools. It is suggested that officer-writers such as Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves, both of whom are considered in this thesis, belonged to the upper-middle and middle-middle classes respectively.

To return to the writing of Patrick MacGill, James Haney and Liam O'Flaherty, in relation to class, a question needs to be posed: how far it is appropriate to consider their work in a specifically Irish working-class tradition? Superficially this may seem problematic:

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<sup>1</sup> Carole Snee, 'Working-Class Literature or Proletarian Writing?' in *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*, ed. by Jon Clark, Margot Heinemann, David Margolies and Carole Snee (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 164. Cannadine described two other models as: 'hierarchical' in which society is interlinked, layered or graded and 'dichotomous' whereby there exists a 'them and us' relationship between the 'patricians and plebs'. In this thesis 'working-class' replaces the term 'lower class'.

while MacGill, Hanley and O'Flaherty all became established writers in the interwar period, as Ruth Sherry outlines in her 'The Irish Working Class Novel', '[t]he concept of Irish working-class writing is not a well-established one'.<sup>1</sup> Sherry's rationale for this position is based upon the difference in experience between the Irish and English working class due to the advanced industrialisation in the latter as against the more largely rural lives of the former. Fewer of the Irish working class were politically conscious or organised than the English and the Irish trade union movement was, at the start of the war, as Niamh Purseil states in her 'War, Work and Labour', on 'the brink of extinction'<sup>2</sup>, although later strengthened in part by the impact of the conflict on Irish working-class families.

The lack of an Irish working-class literary tradition is, as Ruth Sherry outlines, due to 'the very different demographic and economic situation of Ireland'<sup>3</sup> when compared to Britain. There were a limited number of urban centres in Ireland, confined predominantly to Dublin, Cork and Belfast and as Adrian Pimley stated in his 'The Working-class Movement and the Irish Revolution, 1896-1923' '[t]he majority of the population still lived in the countryside and a large section of these were farmers [...] Irish farmers were politically conservative and Catholic [...] Whatever the radicalism of sections of the Irish urban working class it was still a minority in Ireland'.<sup>4</sup> In this comment one can note the idea that a sense of class consciousness - although apparent in rural areas due to the relationship of peasant/tenant to landlord/landowner - was perhaps more organised in urban areas such as Dublin.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Sherry, 'The Irish Working Class in Fiction' in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Niamh Purseil, 'War, Work and Labour' in *Our War: Ireland and the Great War*, ed. by John Horne (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2008), p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Pimley, 'The Working-class Movement and the Irish Revolution, 1896-1923' in *The Revolution in Ireland, 1879-1923*, ed. by D.G. Boyce (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 207.

In the capital, during the first decade of the twentieth century, men such as James Larkin and James Connolly, the latter described by Adrian Pimley as ‘the best Marxist theoretician Ireland ever produced’, did organise trade unions and formed political parties in order to try to improve the lot of the working-class.<sup>1</sup> This was not replicated in the countryside to the same degree, although groups such as the Fenian Brotherhood did attempt to galvanise peasants to recognise the fact that they, the peasants, were suffering class exploitation be that from the British aristocracy, Ireland’s emerging new middle class or even the Catholic Church.

Following the depopulation of rural areas due to the 1848 Famine, there were insufficient industrial occupations in the towns to absorb the displaced; mass emigration, or death, ensued. Not working or living in close proximity, unlike the collective experience of workers in urban Britain, stifled the emergence of an Irish working-class literary tradition. The lack of heavy industry within Ireland, with the noted exception of the Belfast shipyards, influenced the texts written by émigrés such as Patrick MacGill because of the better industrial employment opportunities in England for Irish men and women. In nineteenth century Ireland, industry remained small scale, traditional and often domestic, rather than the heavier manufacturing processes more familiar in Britain. This resulted in émigré Irish working class men and women often being untrained, thereby forcing such individuals to gravitate to unskilled work in Britain as described in memoirs such as James Dawson Burn’s *The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy* (1855), Patrick MacGill’s *Children of the Dead End* (1914) or Donall Mac Amhlaigh’s *An Irish Navy: The Diary of an Exile* (1964).

As Donald M. MacRaild outlined in his *The Irish Diaspora in Britain, 1750-1939* Irish men and women had travelled to Britain for centuries but ‘perhaps five million left

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 197.

[Ireland] in the first seven decades of the nineteenth century'.<sup>1</sup> MacRaild cites a number of factors as to why people emigrated from Ireland, some sought freedom from the Protestant ascendancy, the political, economic and social domination exerted by a minority of landowners, the clergy and members of the professions, all of whom were members of either the Church of Ireland or Church of England. Others wanted to escape the Famine but the majority, MacRaild stated, 'left in search of economic opportunities'.<sup>2</sup> On the eve of the First World War, in the industrial centres such as London, Liverpool, Manchester, Cardiff or Glasgow the Irish made up a third of the population. It was not only in the cities that Irish men and women but also in smaller towns 'from Stafford to Ormskirk and Maryport to Consett'.<sup>3</sup> Irish communities developed throughout England, Scotland and Wales.

Those Irish Catholics who travelled to England swelled the numbers of their religion enormously. At the turn of the nineteenth century English Catholics were few in number, their ranks dominated largely by the landed gentry and aristocracy. In Ireland, however, as Mary Hickman stated in her *Religion, Class and Identity*, 'Catholics comprised seven-eighths of the population and had nothing in common with the Protestant Anglo-Irish land owning ascendancy, the majority of whom belonged to the established (Anglican) Church of Ireland [the] vast majority of Irish Catholics were likely to be members of the peasantry [...]'.<sup>4</sup> The Catholic revival in England, from the mid-nineteenth century, was, in part, due to the large number of Irish immigrants who settled in predominantly urban centres. There was a shift of influence within the English Catholic Church away from the rural landed gentry to an increase in the power of the 'city-dwelling' clergy.<sup>5</sup> One can note this later position in James

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<sup>1</sup> Donald M. MacRaild, *The Irish Diaspora in Britain, 1759-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Mary J. Hickman, *Religion, Class and Identity* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995), p. 98.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 101.

Hanley's *Our Time is Gone* in which the parish priest is at the heart of the émigré Irish working class community.

As the number of Catholics increased a divide emerged between some English and Irish followers of the religion. Both may have shared the same faith 'but differences of class and nationality were overriding'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as Hickman noted, many '[English Catholics] did not welcome the presence of Irish migrants in Britain'.<sup>2</sup> A degree of irony exists in the notion that the arrival of such migrants, although not necessarily welcomed by all who followed the faith, permitted an expansion of the Catholic Church in England and Scotland to take place. If not for the influx of such Irish men and women 'the [Catholic] Church would not have developed its reputation as the only one of the major denominations with a close relationship with its working-class membership'.<sup>3</sup> As will become apparent later in the thesis, James Hanley, in his novel *Our Time is Gone*, portrays just such a relationship between priest and Irish working-class men, one in particular being the dock labourer Joseph Kilkey.

While many English working class novels focus upon industrial workers and their families, for the Irish working class, both at home and in exile, no such tradition existed. What will emerge in this thesis is the identification of a specific strain of Irish working-class writing, one evident in the war writing of the three Irish soldier-writers examined here. It is a strain with its roots in the shared peacetime experiences of unskilled manual labour, wartime service, and links to rural Ireland.

What emerges particularly in James Hanley's portrayal of life on the home front during the conflict is the extent to which the working class is not an undifferentiated, amorphous mass. As Harold Perkin outlined in his *The Rise of Professional Society*, the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

working class 'was broken up into thousands of tiny communities [...] Even the greatest city, from the working class point of view, was a collection of little 'villages' in each everyone knew everyone else, and knew very little beyond it'.<sup>1</sup> Perkin outlines how this urban segregation was based upon 'the economic distinctions between the skilled craftsman, the skilled and semi-skilled factory workers and the unskilled labourers'.<sup>2</sup> A further distinction to be drawn was whether one was 'respectable' or 'rough'; a division decided, Perkin states, upon whether one attended chapel or church: 'Catholic Irish were automatically classed as rough'.<sup>3</sup>

In his text *The Classic Slum*, Robert Roberts considers the stratified nature of working-class society - focusing specifically upon Salford. Roberts noted that the community ranged from '[s]hopkeepers, publicans and skilled tradesmen'<sup>4</sup>, down to the '[u]nskilled workers' - with this latter group divided further by role. Casual workers formed the first cluster, at the top of which were 'dockers [who] lacked prestige through the uncertainty of their calling [...] Irish Roman Catholic immigrants, mostly illiterate, formed the lowest socio-economic stratum'.<sup>5</sup> Irish 'immigrants' are detailed in the works of Patrick MacGill and Liam O'Flaherty, while 'dockers' are also portrayed in James Hanley's *Our Time is Gone*. Thus the Irish soldier-writers were not only subalterns within society due to race and class but they suffered further discrimination due to employment, nationality and their Catholic religion. This position recurs throughout the works considered in this thesis but is particularly relevant to the discussion of James Hanley's *Our Time is Gone*.

In *Our Time is Gone* Hanley depicts not only members of the working-class but the author also portrays those who can be described as being poor. It is important to note that

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp. 21-22.

although social gradation existed within the working-class - from shopkeeper to Irish immigrant - all were employed, to some varying degree. However, as mentioned above, Robert Roberts uses the phrase 'unskilled workers' which permits a brief exploration of the term poor; Roberts defined the 'unskilled' to be:

casual workers of all kinds – dockers in particular [...] then the local street sellers [and] the firewood choppers, bundlers and sellers and the rag and boners, often whole families [...] Forming the base of the social pyramid we had the bookies' runners, idlers, part-time beggars and petty thieves, together with all those known to have been in prison whatever might be their ostensible economic or social standing.<sup>1</sup>

Thus if one considers Robert Roberts' definition of 'unskilled' to include individuals who were 'beggars and petty thieves' one can note a group below the working-class. Richard Peet, in his 'Inequality and Poverty: A Marxist-Geographic Theory', noted that: 'Marx also explained how the normal operation of capitalism necessarily produces a more-or-less permanent underclass of unemployed and, therefore, poor people'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, for the capitalist economies to operate, Marx believed, there needed to be an 'industrial reserve army'<sup>3</sup> who were a pool of poor people who could be used and then discarded as best suited the capitalists. These individuals provide the labour by which the capitalist system could respond to sudden surges of demand created by the opening up of new markets. When the newly created demand slackened, this labour was discarded. This group sank below the level of the rest of the working class and into poverty due to lower and/or irregular wages.

In James Hanley's five novels depicting the Fury family the matriarch is shown sliding into poverty. In *Our Time is Gone* Fanny Fury is portrayed as being casual labour, one of 'thirty women' hired to clean the troopship.<sup>4</sup> Fanny Fury's life had 'disintegrated' to the extent that all '[her] world was so small that now you could remove the whole lot of it in

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, pp. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Peet, 'Inequality and Poverty: A Marxist-Geographic Theory' in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (December 1975), p. 566.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Volume One*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 784.

<sup>4</sup> James Hanley, *Our Time is Gone*, p. 369.

a handcart pulled by a small boy. And nobody noticed'.<sup>1</sup> Fanny Fury has descended to the point that the cleaning of the ship is 'the last job on earth, and the first in hell. It's the lowest of the low'.<sup>2</sup> Thus the term working-class used in this thesis is done so on the recognition that it refers to a person's specific circumstances rather than simply placing a person within a class based but homogenised mass.

What will be considered in the following chapters is the extent to which Irish soldier-writers portrayed a sense of camaraderie between working-class men in the trenches. As Patrick MacGill described in an article for *Pearson's Magazine* in 1915, 'the new army is a miniature pattern of the society that created it [...] it has its poor and its wealthy, the poor dine on bully-beef [and the] wealthy dine well'.<sup>3</sup> The class system was transposed from wider society and into the trenches and becomes evident, it will be argued in this thesis, through the writers attention to the minutiae of a combatant's life in the frontline, for example undertaking manual labour in the trenches or the application of medical aid to the wounded - aspects of trench warfare not often portrayed by the officers. This level of description assists in portraying the extent to which the three Irish writers depict the camaraderie engendered by war in a manner different from that of the officer-writers, as the working-class men focus more upon the physical presence of the men around them than on any political basis to the conflict.

It is recognised here that the idea of an Irish working class literary tradition is complicated in relation to prose literature of the First World War due to the limited number of Irish soldiers who wrote of their experiences. The Irish identity of the subjects in this thesis is key to understanding their perspective on the war, but in-so-far as they participated in a working-class tradition, it is also useful to consider them, as the thesis will go on to do, in

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 279.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 371.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick MacGill, 'Out There' in *Pearson's Magazine*, September 1915, p. 293.



relation to the wider body of European First World War writing produced by other working class soldiers, specifically the French combatants Henri Barbusse and Gabriel Chevallier alongside the German Erich Maria Remarque. A pan-national political and class sensibility is as relevant to understanding the Irishmen's detachment from the outlook of the British army at the time as is their nationality. This thesis will position the three Irish writers as a particular facet within this European canon of working class soldiers.

There is, it will be argued in this thesis, a further connection to working class literature. Clair Wills' 'Realism and the Irish Immigrant: Documentary, Fiction, and Postwar Irish Labor' considers the literary representation of the Irish working-class by those from Ireland in the post-war era.<sup>1</sup> One of the texts to which Wills refers is Donall Mac Amhlaigh's *An Irish Navvy: The Diary of an Exile* (1964), a work that permits a connection to be drawn out in this thesis between the three soldier-writers and later twentieth century Irish working-class literature due to similarities in experience. Mac Amhlaigh's memoir, like MacGill's *Children of the Dead End*, depicts the itinerant nature of the life of a navvy, as opposed to the more broadly fixed workplace and existence of the British working class; the latter typified by the canonical representations in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913) and *The Rainbow* (1915), or Lewis Jones's *Cwmardy* (1935) and *We Live* (1939).

The texts of men such as Mac Amhlaigh and MacGill share a portrayal of work that is itinerant and principally outdoor, with an emphasis on physicality. Furthermore their memoirs provide the reader with a sense that the navvies are at the bottom of a social and economic system, one in which their lives are controlled by investors, company owners, contractors and foremen. While such a stratified social structure is also apparent in British working class writing it is a somewhat different level, be that in the factory or coalmine, as

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<sup>1</sup> Clair Wills, 'Realism and the Irish Immigrant: Documentary, Fiction and Postwar Irish Labor' in *Modern Language Quarterly* 73:3 (September 2012), pp. 373-394.

the men have a degree of worker's rights. The itinerant nature of physically demanding outdoor work within a hierarchical organisation in which one is effectively the lowest, stripped of many rights, is a condition that also characterises army life for the non-officer combatants. In addition to MacGill's experience as a navvy, he, together with James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty, were all volunteer soldiers and therefore their involvement in the conflict can be viewed as emigration for employment comparable to Mac Amhlaigh's experiences as a navvy in England of the 1950s. It will be argued that this strain of Irish working class war writing shares similarities with later writers from Ireland, and so enables these soldiers' work to be viewed within a wider literary context than purely the First World War.

It is to be noted that the experiences of life working as soldiers in the British army, as delineated by Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty were, for some working class men, despite the threat of death, actually better than the circumstances they experienced in peacetime. British soldiers did not remain in the front line trench, the firing line, for the entirety of their time in service. Indeed, as Gordon Corrigan, in his *Mud, Blood and Poppycock*, has estimated that 'a battalion could expect, on average, to spend just ten days a month in the trenches'.<sup>1</sup> The army ensured soldiers were regularly rotated from the firing line to support trenches positioned behind the frontline and from there they were set into billets, which were, usually, a safe distance from the fighting.

While in these rest areas the men had free time, underwent further training, had access to hot water for bathing, fresh clothing and a better standard of food than that provided while at the front. Gordon Corrigan stated that '[s]oldiers did not complain about lack of food, although they did complain about its monotony'. Corrigan goes on to list how the 4,111 calories issued to a soldier per day was broken down: 'fresh or frozen meat 18 oz [...] bread

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

18 oz [...] fresh vegetables 8 oz'.<sup>1</sup> In such rest areas a soldier in the ranks could also buy alcohol – an item forbidden when in the trenches, other a supervised issue of rum – and indulge in other social pastimes.

In addition to the conditions detailed above, the men were paid. As Richard Holmes stated in his *Tommy* the amount was '1 shilling a day' but it was regular and war widows were entitled to pensions if their husband was killed.<sup>2</sup> The danger many men faced while serving in France should not be ignored but, it is suggested, for many working-class men, and indeed their families, military conditions of service provided for a better standard of living than they perhaps had experienced in civilian life.

### **Samuel Hynes's 'Myth of the War'**

The working class tradition considered in this thesis stands in tension with the more established British canon, a form of writing that provides a context for this discussion as represented by Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, Robert Graves and R.C. Sheriff. Samuel Hynes, in his *A War Imagined* (1990), has identified the war writing of these four men, together with nineteen others, as contributing to the 'classic narratives' depicting the First World War. All of their key texts were published between 1926 and 1933, and Hynes argues that the works released during this timeframe were pivotal in the formation of what he termed as 'the Myth of the War' - a particular view of the conflict that 'still retains authority'.<sup>3</sup> This 'Myth' centres upon officers such as Sassoon and Graves who, 'disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences'<sup>4</sup>, wrote of their times in France several years after the Armistice. Hynes presents the view that such a specific version of the conflict emerged because '[t]he classic narratives of the war that were written in the late Twenties share many elements: common themes, a common language, a common range of

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (London: Cassell, 2004), pp. 96-97.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Holmes, *Tommy* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. xxvi.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined* (London: Pimlico, 1992), p. 424.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. x.

tones'.<sup>1</sup> Hynes's use of the phrase 'common language' is then expanded upon, as he argues that 'the old high rhetoric of war had been emptied of its meaning and its values, and that the truth about war could only be told in the plainest, most physical words'.<sup>2</sup> This thesis engages with, and expands upon, Hynes's account in arguing that authors such as MacGill, Hanley and O'Flaherty employed language that speaks more plainly and physically still than those considered by Hynes to have shaped the 'Myth of the War' and thereby prompts a reinterpretation not only of what such characteristics might mean, but also what they might do.

One aspect of the 'Myth' to which Hynes alludes is a rupture that the war occasioned, a break with certain pre-war values and a comfortable existence. For some who went to war, they were 'separated [...] from the past and their cultural inheritance'.<sup>3</sup> This idea of discontinuity exists even in the more disparate retellings of the conflict and pervades cultural understandings of the role of the war in, for example, the rise of modernism. A feature of the texts to be considered in this thesis, however, is the absence of any such break as the works of the Irish soldier-writers explore, or imply, a degree of continuity of experience for such working-class individuals between the hardship, privation and brutality of peacetime and that of their lives serving in the trenches as privates in the British army. It is this aspect of the war writing of MacGill, Hanley and O'Flaherty that offers a different perspective on the conflict and its meanings from that of the established canon, however critical of idealised depictions of the war the latter may be.

### **A Critical Overview Of The Irish Soldier-Writers**

Of the three soldier-writers examined in this thesis Patrick MacGill is the one whose war texts are starting to attract most attention. Keith Jeffrey, in his *Ireland and the Great War*,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 425.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 439.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.x.

makes brief mention to the plot of MacGill's play *Suspense*, and comments upon *The Red Horizon* and *Fear!*, although Jeffery ignores altogether *The Great Push*. Of *The Red Horizon* Jeffrey describes it as being 'starkly realistic [but] not in any fundamental way subversive'; continuing that 'the book celebrates the *joie de vivre* of the Irish and British soldiers'.<sup>1</sup> *Fear!*, Jeffrey posits, 'is a very early example of a genre of grimly realistic writing which was to become quite widespread later in the decade'.<sup>2</sup> In relation to Liam O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute*, Jeffrey states that it contains 'gratuitous horror [...] there is no narrative development, and Gunn's rising madness is particularly unconvincing'.<sup>3</sup> No mention is made in *Ireland and the Great War* of *The Black Soul* or to any of James Hanley's war writing. This thesis will go beyond elements commented upon by Jeffrey, notably the realism of Patrick MacGill's work and the 'horror' of Liam O'Flaherty's novel, together with the psychological impact of the war on the character '[Private] Gunn'. It will be argued, however, that both writers, to re-appropriate Jeffrey's term, are '[un]convincing' in their narrative styles and in their portrayal of the war, presenting a more nuanced, and detailed, depiction of the war than Jeffrey's comments suggest.

David Taylor has written four essays and a monograph on Patrick MacGill's war writing.<sup>4</sup> Taylor's essays all focus upon an argument that can be found in his last paper, 'From Fighting the War to Writing the War: From Glory to Guilt?', in which he states that '[a]n examination of Patrick MacGill's writings about the war reveal a dramatic shift from a heroic, even glorious interpretation, as seen in his wartime writings, to one dominated by

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Jeffrey, *Ireland and the Great War*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

<sup>4</sup> See the essays by David Taylor, 'A Little Man In A Great War': Patrick MacGill And The London Irish Rifles' in *WAR: Identities in Conflict 1300-2000*, ed. by Bertrand Taithe and Tim Thornton (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), pp. 235-249; Taylor, 'The Minstrel Boy to the War has Gone: Rifleman 3008, Patrick MacGill and a Soldier's Experience of the First World War' in *The Representation and Reality of War*, ed. by Keith Dockray and Keith Laybourn (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), pp. 190-202; Taylor, 'Blood, Mud and Futility? Patrick MacGill and the Experience of the Great War' in *European Review of History* 13:2, pp. 229-250.

guilt'.<sup>1</sup> Taylor's argument is predicated upon the idea that MacGill's 'heroic' ideals, displayed in *The Red Horizon* and *The Great Push*, were based upon 'a collective element [and an] individual element (the romance of the rifleman)'.<sup>2</sup> In part, Taylor suggests, MacGill's sense of guilt is based upon the author's 'knowledge that his actions had indirectly brought suffering to the innocent widows and children of those he had killed'.<sup>3</sup>

In his *Memory, Narrative and the Great War* David Taylor continues in this vein discussing how, in his war memoirs, MacGill 'was able to create a heroic narrative', and that his feelings of 'survivor guilt' were compounded by the fact that '[MacGill] played an active role in sustaining the war effort, raising money for the wounded (and the families of the dead) but also encouraging young (and not so young) men to fight'.<sup>4</sup> This thesis will engage with, and build upon, the work of David Taylor as research for this discussion has uncovered previously unpublished material that challenges such notions of 'the heroic' and the circumstances outlined by Taylor surrounding the cause, and recording of, the author's sense of 'guilt'. A new reading of the war writings of Patrick McGill is presented, one in which the author will be seen to be less engaged with views, such as patriotism, that underpinned for many people the prosecution of the war, as Taylor's phrase 'glorious interpretation' of the war implies, and more so with aspects of the role of a soldier as being a continuation of MacGill's pre-war working class experience.

Terry Phillips, in her 'The Wisdom of Experience: Patrick MacGill's Irishness Reassessed'<sup>5</sup>, considers MacGill's war writing in the context of Irish literary traditions from the last century. Phillips bases her discussion of MacGill's writing on the idea that he writes

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<sup>1</sup> David Taylor, 'From Fighting the War to Writing the War: From Glory to Guilt?' in *Contemporary British History* (Vol. 23 Issue 3, 2009), p. 293.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 298.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 306.

<sup>4</sup> David Taylor, *Memory, Narrative and the Great War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 201-202.

<sup>5</sup> Terry Phillips, 'The Wisdom of Experience: Patrick MacGill's Irishness Reassessed', *Sub-Versions, Transnational Readings of Modern Irish Literature* ed. by Ciaran Ross (Amsterdam and New York: Rodolpi, 2010), pp. 29-52.

from experience and observation. Ultimately Phillips argues that MacGill occupies a minor place within an Irish literary tradition and that he should be viewed as a war writer alongside others who wrote having experienced that conflict, irrespective of rank. Building upon the work by Taylor and Phillips, and its acknowledgement of MacGill's significance both in relation to Irish literature and war writing, this thesis nevertheless offers a more nuanced positioning of MacGill by linking him with James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty in a pan-European tradition of working class soldier-writers, and a wider strain of Irish working-class literature.

There is only one monograph relating to James Hanley, John Fordham's *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class*. There, Fordham argues that although Hanley's work is commonly identified with proletarian realism, portraying the working class lives of his characters, he should be viewed in terms of his engagement with modernism. Fordham's analysis of Hanley's writing demonstrates the importance of class for understanding not only modernism but also Hanley's work. A discussion of class, specifically Hanley's, but equally Patrick MacGill's and Liam O'Flaherty's and the portrayal of the lives of their working class characters is at the core of this thesis; a discussion that builds upon the work of Fordham to include analysis of *The German Prisoner* and *Our Time is Gone*, in relation to both of which Fordham limits himself purely to synopsis

Joseph Pridmore's 'Feeling is like poison and a certain kind of high explosive': torture, homoeroticism and subversion in James Hanley's *The German Prisoner*'<sup>1</sup> presents the view that the position Richard Aldington adopts, in his Introduction to the novella, misrepresents the tenor of Hanley's text. Aldington states that the working class protagonists of *The German Prisoner* were victims, corrupted by their experiences in the trenches,

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Pridmore, 'Feeling is like poison and a certain kind of high explosive': torture, homoeroticism and subversion in James Hanley's *The German Prisoner*', [www.pennilesspress.co.uk/prose/hanley](http://www.pennilesspress.co.uk/prose/hanley) [Accessed 4 February 2009], pp. 1-10.

whereas Pridmore believes that through the homoerotic content, linked to their infliction of torture, the two soldiers, one Irish the other English, are simply ‘not pleasant’ men.

Pridmore’s essay introduces the term homoeroticism in relation to the novella but its use will be challenged as, it will be argued, it is inappropriate in the context of Hanley’s text precisely because the soldiers are ‘not pleasant’ individuals.

Anne Rice’s ‘A Peculiar Power about Rottenness’: Annihilating Desire in James Hanley’s *The German Prisoner*<sup>1</sup> posits the notion that Hanley’s text exposes the brutality of the conflict, rather than celebrating the culture of war, through the release of homoerotic desire in an act of extreme violence. Rice argues that the comradeship displayed within Hanley’s novella is inextricably linked to brutality because it is a component part of combat, one that counters how many people wished to remember the war. This thesis builds on the work of Pridmore and Rice to offer a different reading of Hanley’s novella by considering *The German Prisoner* revealing a sort of camaraderie of corruption, as Rice argues, a flip-side of the usual presentation of camaraderie in war, but also gives this corruption a particular flavour overlooked by these two commentators, among other things, in using the crucifixion as a negative point of reference, part of a larger strategy in the use of religion by the writers under discussion.

There are four monographs concerning Liam O’Flaherty but they barely concern themselves with the author’s war writing. James O’Brien’s only comment about *Return of the Brute* in his *Liam O’Flaherty* (1976) is that it is a ‘crudely and evidently hastily written novel [that] hardly rises above a conventional protest against the horror of trench warfare’.<sup>2</sup> The idea that O’Flaherty’s text is a ‘protest’ against the conflict will be expanded upon in this thesis. Importantly O’Brien’s dismissal of the novel as having been ‘crudely [and] hastily

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Rice, ‘A Peculiar Power about Rottenness’: Annihilating Desire in James Hanley’s *The German Prisoner* in *Modernism/modernity*, (Volume 9 Number One 2002), pp. 75-89.

<sup>2</sup> James O’Brien, *Liam O’Flaherty* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1973). p. 59.



written' will be challenged. It will be argued that *Return of the Brute*, through elements of the narrative that are expressionist in tone, offers a detailed insight into war-induced trauma suffered by soldiers in combat, one of whom was the author himself.

Patrick Sheeran, in *The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty*, states that *Return of the Brute* 'did not merit serious critical attention'. He expands upon this observation by stating later in his text that 'O'Flaherty made direct use of his terrible experiences at the front – too direct – the experiences are raw and unassimilated and the novel must be one of the worst ever published'<sup>1</sup>. It will be shown in this thesis that it is precisely because the narrative depicts such reality that makes both of these works worthy of close consideration.

Two further monographs, Paul Doyle's *Liam O'Flaherty*<sup>2</sup> (1971) and A.A. Kelly's *Liam O'Flaherty the Storyteller*<sup>3</sup> (1976) make no mention of Liam O'Flaherty's war writing. Only one article has been published concerning Liam O'Flaherty's work in the last seven years, and none have critically considered either *Return of the Brute* or *The Black Soul*. As one can note from the dates of publication, the monographs were written forty years ago: this thesis will not only bring a new critical perspective to Liam O'Flaherty but it will also, for the first time, closely consider his literature - inspired by the conflict, together with his place as a war writer. The thesis will address the lacuna to be found in most writing of the First World War in literature, which neglects these Irish writers altogether, or at most touches briefly on Patrick MacGill as a poet, offering instead a ground breaking analysis that will modify the critical landscape in this area.

The lack of references to the working class Irish soldier-writers extends to those whose focus is Ireland and the First World War. Texts that consider the Irish contribution to the war from an historical perspective, works such as A.E.C. Bredin's *A History of the Irish*

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Sheeran, *The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1976), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Doyle, *Liam O'Flaherty* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> A.A. Kelly, *Liam O'Flaherty: The Storyteller* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976).

*Soldier*; Myles Dungan's *Irish Voices from the Great War*; or the collection of essays contained in *Ireland and the Great War*, edited by Adrian Gregory and Senia Paseta, do not examine the literary works of any Irish soldier.

Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) is a work that has become the touchstone for many who wish to further understand the literature of that conflict. Fussell's text analyses works by soldier-writers whose poetry and prose have come to be regarded as canonical, placing them in a variety of contexts established through the 'letters and diaries of serving soldiers, from contemporary journalism, from popular culture, from rumour and legends'.<sup>1</sup> Fussell analyses the literary responses of those who actually experienced the war, both those who became established war writers and ordinary soldiers. Fussell also examines how the public's reaction to such novels and memoirs established a canon that was ultimately mythologised.

Equally influential in the field of critical war literature is Samuel Hynes's *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, discussed earlier. Hynes focuses upon the cultural history of the war and its aftermath, to the beginning of the Second World War. Both Fussell and Hynes are important to this thesis because of their discussion of war literature and personal 'autobiography', leading to an identification, through a canon of established war writers, to Hynes's 'Myth of War'. The texts of these three Irish soldier-writers are to be examined within this context of a familiar literary response to the conflict but, crucially for this thesis, they are not part of the Fussell or Hynes's analysis.

Bernard Bergonzi's *Heroes' Twilight*, like Fussell and Hynes, similarly limits his consideration of war writers to those of the canon with an aim to be of interest to 'a general educated readership'.<sup>2</sup> Eric J. Leed's work *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World*

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight* (Manchester: Carcanet Publishing, 1996), p. 2.

*War I*, is not a text about war literature *per se* but is instead an examination of war neurosis. Examples are taken from war memoirs, permitting a discussion on the inadequacy of language to fully convey the experience of combat; a discussion that moves toward the subject of modernism and modernist language. This is important when considering the writings of particularly James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty as both depict men suffering from war-induced trauma, but do so through non-realistic narrative: modernism in Hanley's novella and expressionism in O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute*. For both men, it is argued, the language of realism proves inadequate for their descriptions of aspects of the conflict.

At this point it is appropriate to pose a question, one related to the idea of register: for whom was the war writing of the three Irish soldier-writers intended? The texts by Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty were all written at differing times, and for varying audiences. Patrick MacGill's memoirs, *The Red Horizon* and *The Great Push*, were published while the author was serving in the trenches, in 1915, and their aim was, as stated by MacGill in *The Great Push*, to reveal to his readers '[t]he guilty secrecy of war'.<sup>1</sup> The realism of MacGill's memoirs, it is argued, enabled the author to bring to a wartime public readership a portrayal of the conflict not apparent in either the highly regulated newspapers or the propaganda published through Wellington House from where, in the years 1916 to 1918, as will be considered in Chapter Two, Patrick MacGill wrote propaganda material for Britain's Ministry of Intelligence.

Patrick MacGill's wartime novels were published in Britain through MacGill's pre-war publisher Herbert Jenkins. In the United States two companies, George H. Doran, New York together with Grosset and Dunlap distributed MacGill's texts. These two publishers brought Patrick MacGill's work to an American readership not only to entertain but also, it is argued, to increase the recruitment of troops in order to assist the allied military cause.

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1915), Foreword.

As will become apparent in some of the letters Patrick MacGill wrote to Canon Dalton, discussed in Chapters One and Two of this thesis, MacGill was very interested in the financial rewards to be gained from writing. As such, it can be suggested, one motivation behind MacGill's novel of the interwar period, *Fear!*, was monetary gain. Given Patrick MacGill's poverty riven childhood this is not an unreasonable driver for a man who was a published author. Having served in the frontline MacGill may have recognised an opportunity to write about experiences with which he was familiar and his readership - many in Britain and abroad will have been exposed to his wartime literary work through novels and newspaper articles – could have been interested due to the recent cessation of hostilities.

James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty did not publish their war-writings until after 1918. Hanley's novella *The German Prisoner* was published privately, in a limited print run of 500, possibly due to its violent and sexualised imagery of acts committed on the battlefield. The circumstances of the novella's publication will be considered in this thesis but the question will remain as to whether the text was for a select clientele only, due to its content, or if Hanley simply could not get a mainstream distributor as he was a relatively unknown author. The war writing of James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty, it is argued in later chapters, were influenced by their experiences as infantrymen in France, and they do so using modes of writing that convey to their readership, both military and non-military, the chaotic nature of warfare, together with the lasting legacy such experiences have upon the protagonists. In so doing, as did Patrick MacGill, all three men are bringing to a general readership the experiences of working-class soldiers at a time when many of the men who were writing of such events did so from the perspective of having served as officers.

## **Chapter Overview**

This thesis consists of six ensuing chapters, the first of which will examine Patrick MacGill's *The Amateur Army*, *The Red Horizon* and *The Great Push*. In the consideration of these texts

reference will be made to MacGill's pre-war novel *Children of the Dead End* in order to draw out the continuities between the author's identification of himself as working-class navvy in peacetime and his wartime experiences as a working-class private soldier. In addition, there will be a discussion of Patrick MacGill's use of Roman Catholic imagery, thereby considering the extent to which, although connected to views espoused by the British establishment, in reality MacGill was also estranged from them.

In the second chapter Patrick MacGill's novel *The Brown Brethren*, together with his post-war work *Fear!*, will be examined. MacGill's role as a propagandist stands in apparent opposition to his critique of the conflict as portrayed in his memoirs, but an examination of *The Brown Brethren* illustrates MacGill's ability to deftly move between two positions: a British government propagandist as well as someone privately critical of the Empire's role in the war. In his interwar novel *Fear!*, MacGill condemns what he perceives to be the imperialist motives of the British Empire through a depiction of the exploitation experienced by working class characters, both English and Irish.

Included within the two chapters relating to Patrick MacGill will be references to letters written by MacGill held in archives at Worcester College, University of Oxford, Random House Publishing and in the Berg Collection, New York Public library. All three were uncovered during research for this thesis. The latter two collections relate purely to financial matters between MacGill and his publisher, Herbert Jenkins, but those in Worcester College are correspondences of a more personal nature between the author and Canon John Dalton, chaplain to Queen Victoria and tutor to both King George V and Prince Albert Victor. Dalton employed Patrick MacGill at Windsor Castle in order to, as MacGill stated in an interview with the *The Windsor, Eton and Slough Express* newspaper, '[copy] out ancient

manuscripts in the Chapter library'<sup>1</sup>. The two men wrote to each other from 1912, including many from the trenches, until 1927 when the correspondence suddenly - and without apparent reason - ceased.

Owen Dudley Edwards, one of only a small number of academics to have written about MacGill, believed that '[t]heir correspondence probably perished when Hugh Dalton [...] burnt almost of his father's papers after the Canon's death in 1931' but this has proved not to be the case.<sup>2</sup> The archive consists of approximately one hundred unpublished letters and postcards from MacGill to the clergyman in addition to several written by Dalton, one by MacGill's future wife, the American novelist Margaret Gibbons, and one from Herbert Jenkins his publisher. As no monography relating to Patrick MacGill's life exists this previously unused material provides a valuable insight into the motivations of the author. It contains letters covering a range of subjects from MacGill's concern about social etiquette while in the Canon's employ to those written from the trenches of France, including two that, unedited, became chapters in his war memoir *The Red Horizon*. In addition Patrick MacGill writes to Canon Dalton with regard to MacGill's interwar novel, *Fear!*, outlining his underlying view as to the purpose of the text. The Patrick MacGill archives are not only a fascinating insight into the author but are also unique in the sense that, as will be discussed in the thesis, Irish working-class navies tended not to document either their personal or working lives.

James Hanley's novella *The German Prisoner* will be considered in the third chapter. This text portrays the sadistic torture and murder of a German soldier at the hands of British infantrymen, one Irish and one English. The urban backgrounds of the two British working class privates will be examined in order to consider the continuity presented between the

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Windsor, Eton and Slough Express*, 15 February 1913, p.1. Copy in the Canon Dalton archive.

<sup>2</sup> Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Patrick MacGill and the making of a historical source: with a handlist of his works' in *The Innes Review* Vol. XXXVII, No. 2 Autumn, 1986, p.88.

soldiers' peacetime and wartime lives. The depiction of working-class identity in this story is at odds, to some extent, with that in Hanley's other writing; complicating the current account of how class functions in these writers' works. Hanley's portrayal of the murder of the German soldier is viewed as a perversion of Christ's crucifixion, giving a new and particular inflection to the idea that death in war is stripped of meaning. Commonplace within World War One literature is a comparison with the sacrifice of Christ, implying that death in battle held an intrinsic value, thereby enabling individuals to make sense of the incomprehensible, the loss of a loved one. This notion is challenged and indeed undermined completely by the use of religious imagery by these three Irish soldier-writers, which sees the graduation of imagery from a questioning of religious significance in MacGill to the pollution of such a message by Hanley.

In the fourth chapter James Hanley's novel *Our Time is Gone* will be examined, together with elements of Hanley's short story 'Narrative'. Both texts portray underrepresented arenas connected to the First World War: the home front, where individuals whose work brings them into contact with the detritus of war; and the service of ships, merchant sailors and civilians who come under attack from enemy submarines. Furthermore, in *Our Time is Gone* Hanley's description of the parading in public of a contentious objector, an Irish working-class manual worker, is analysed as a portrayal of Christ's walk to Calvary. This will develop my argument about the charged role of religion in these writers' depiction of the war and its effect. Hanley's novel highlights the exploitation of the working class during the war in a manner that connects with similar representations in the texts of Patrick MacGill and Liam O'Flaherty.

The fifth chapter will examine Liam O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute*. In this novel O'Flaherty's critique of war engages both with loss of life and the change of identity of the working-class soldier, whose particular role in the conflict as an infantry private engenders

brutish and primitive behaviour. O'Flaherty's characters are not completely reduced to brutishness, however, as the author also registers the mental toll taken by the war. In doing so, it gives a striking portrayal of trauma, an illness that lies in tension with the state of brute.

The final chapter will consider Liam O'Flaherty's novel *The Black Soul*, a work that is unique in this thesis because it is the only text to portray a soldier returning home after the 1918 Armistice. O'Flaherty's novel depicts an Irishman who had fought as a private in the British army returning to Ireland, specifically a small island off the West Coast of County Mayo. The ex-soldier suffers from trauma and travelled to the island in order to find rest but, in so doing, experiences difficulties due to his connection to the British Empire. This novel highlights the tensions for the Irish soldier fighting for Britain. The thesis concludes in reflecting upon the impact of the Irish working class at home and the 'home' perspective on the war.

This thesis will argue that the three Irish working class, Roman Catholic soldier-writers Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty - as privates, the lowest rank in the army - constitute a distinct group of war writers. These characteristics shape an alternative perspective of the First World War in their writing, one very different from that of the canonical English officer-writers, men such as Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden or R.C. Sherriff who, however critical of the war they may have been, were to some degree shaped by the culture and outlook which underpinned it. The social and political heritage of the Irish soldier-writers brought them to a more nuanced relationship with the conflict, one that was at times ambiguous and certainly ambivalent in relation to the wider arguments regarding imperialism, patriotism, duty or sacrifice; factors that initially drove many in Britain to fight for the Empire. To begin this process Patrick MacGill's war memoirs, *The Amateur Army*, *The Red Horizon* and *The Great Push* will now be examined.



## Chapter One: 'Laying Open Wounds to the World: Patrick MacGill's Wartime Memoirs *The Amateur Army*, *The Red Horizon* and *The Great Push*'

### Introduction

In 1963 Dominic Behan, the Irish republication songwriter, novelist and playwright, brother to Brendan, wrote 'McAlpine's Fusiliers' for the folk group *The Dubliners*, a song that portrayed the physically hard and often violent life experienced by Irish labourers: 'I grafted hard and I've got me cards and many a gangers fist across me ears. If you pride your life, don't join, by Christ, with McAlpine's Fusiliers'.<sup>1</sup> Behan's lyrics describe the migration of labour from Ireland to Britain that took place in the 1930s and 40s as Irishmen sought employment with construction companies such as one owned by the Englishman Sir Robert McAlpine. Despite referring to later in the twentieth century the song is underpinned by a connection of two roles pertinent to the earlier war writing of Patrick MacGill, navy and soldier.

The melody of Behan's song, at 120 beats a minute and in 4/4 time, is at the pace of a quick march, and is suggestive of a body of men on the move, an idea reflected in lyrics such as the navvies going to work with 'their shovels slung behind them'.<sup>2</sup> 'Slung', derived from the word 'sling', a strap for carrying a rifle over one's shoulder, is a term also used by soldiers, as Patrick MacGill noted in *The Amateur Army*: 'At the word of command rifles were slung over the shoulders, and the battalion found voice, first in brisk conversation and exchange of witticisms, then in shouting and song'.<sup>3</sup> In this description MacGill is marching on a training exercise, together with his comrades. What is significant for this thesis is the similarity of this image with that in 'McAlpine's Fusiliers'. Both Behan's navvies and Private MacGill carry their respective work equipment in an identical manner, a detail that, as

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<sup>1</sup> Dominic Behan, 'McAlpine's Fusiliers', [www.irish-folk-songs.com/mcalpines-fusiliers-lyrics-and-chords](http://www.irish-folk-songs.com/mcalpines-fusiliers-lyrics-and-chords) [Accessed 15/07/2015]. 'Cards' related to documents demonstrating one's employment eligibility.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Amateur Army* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1915), p. 32.

will be shown in this chapter, assumes further relevance with the '[ex]change' of role referred to in the Introduction. Navvies became infantrymen who then frequently reverted back to labourers as they worked with shovels and picks in the trenches.

Behan's words reflect the 'tough'<sup>1</sup> and dangerous work such 'Fusiliers' undertook; often there were fatalities: 'I remember the day that the Bear O'Shea fell into a concrete stairs/What the Horseface said, when he saw him dead, well it wasn't what the rich call prayers/I'm a navvy short was the one retort that reached unto my ears'.<sup>2</sup> The song describes where such émigrés toiled, many in subterranean locations such as 'underneath the Thames in a hole'. In so doing, it conveys a sense of the pride felt by the navvies because to do such work 'you must be tough'.<sup>3</sup> The sentiments in this song and Patrick MacGill's war memoirs share many images of place and experience. For 'McAlpine's Fusiliers', situated as they were outside of mainstream society, toughness accompanied a notion of comradeship and friendship from which they derived both a group and individual identity similar to that of soldiers, many of whom were Irish, who went to the trenches of France in 1914.

The word 'Fusilier' connects with Irish military history. In the First World War many regiments from Ireland contained the term in their names - The Royal Munster Fusiliers, The Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the Royal Irish Fusiliers are but three - and as such thousands of Irishmen fought, and died, as fusiliers on the battlefields of France, Gallipoli and further afield.<sup>4</sup> Behan's text, however, goes further than simply suggesting this connection between Irish navy and soldier: the lyrics resonate with a deeper Irish sensibility centred upon the notion of class and a relationship to Britain that saw Irishmen emigrate, often reluctantly, in order to earn money, and thereby unavoidably serve an Empire that indirectly drove them to such measures in the first place.

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<sup>1</sup> Dominic Behan, 'McAlpine's Fusiliers'.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> A.E.C. Bredin, *A History of the Irish Soldier* (Belfast: Century Books, 1987), p. 549.

The sentiments highlighted above in Dominic Behan's text, written fifty-five years after the Armistice was signed, will be considered in this opening chapter in relation to Patrick MacGill's First World War memoirs, *The Amateur Army*, *The Red Horizon* and *The Great Push*. MacGill portrays in these works, as 'tough' and dangerous, manual labour: namely the fighting experiences of an Irish, Roman Catholic, working-class infantry soldier in training, and then the trenches. This first chapter is the beginning of an overarching chronological thread that runs through this thesis, from MacGill's training to the final chapter's consideration of Liam O'Flaherty's novel, *The Black Soul*, and the homecoming to Ireland of an ex-soldier. This structure permits one to view aspects of Ireland's social and cultural history in relation to the different motivations and experiences of the Irish men who enlisted, and of the Irishwomen whose lives were also impacted by the war.

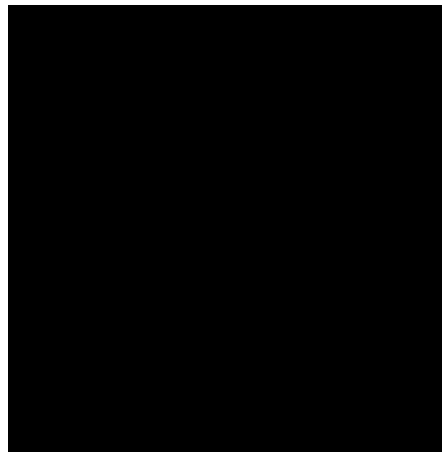
In MacGill's portrayal of his experiences elements of the narrative challenge the views associated with the British Empire which underpinned the conflict. Patrick McGill charts a delicate path between support for, and critical commentary of, a contemporaneous war in which he was a serving participant, making his critique quite remarkable. What will emerge in this thesis is the extent to which the three Irish soldier-writers present a different perspective of the war to that of the English officer-writers. This difference is rooted in the detailing of a nuanced, and distinctive, relationship of Irish soldiers to the British army, an organ of Empire.

Relatedly, Dominic Behan's positioning in his title of 'McAlpine' and 'Fusilier' is suggestive of a further theme that will be explored in this chapter, namely a certain continuity that existed for soldiers such as Patrick MacGill, one between their working lives in peacetime, as navvies, and their employment in wartime. This specific idea, applicable to a significant number of soldiers in the ranks, can not only be found in the writing of Patrick MacGill but also that of two French soldier writers, Gabriel Chevallier and Henri Barbusse

who, as infantrymen, also wrote of the manner in which working class men were involved in the conflict. A link will then be made to later twentieth century Irish working-class writing - with especial reference to Donall Mac Amhlaigh's memoir *An Irish Navvy: The Diary of an Exile* - in the interests of a tentative identification of an Irish working-class literary tradition that embraces the writers in question.

### **Private Patrick MacGill's Irish Identity**

Patrick MacGill, it is argued, held a seemingly ambivalent, and certainly flexible, attitude to the war, one dependent upon the precise circumstances in which he found himself. As will become clear as the thesis progresses, MacGill maintained his Irish identity throughout the conflict, beginning with the regiment he joined, the London Irish Rifles (L.I.R.), a unit whose uniform bore symbols associated with Ireland, as their cap badge illustrates:



**Figure Three**

The shamrock is believed to have been used by Saint Patrick as a metaphor for the Holy Trinity, a notion central to Catholicism, while the harp is a heraldic symbol traditionally associated with the King of Ireland. A crown does sit atop the badge, representing the oath of loyalty all members of the regiment took to the British establishment. Although pledging to serve the monarch, Irishmen such as Patrick MacGill went into battle wearing symbols steeped in Ireland's history and mythology.

Even in France the L.I.R. exhibited a collective sense of Irishness. In *The Red Horizon* MacGill describes how ‘St. Patrick’s Day was an event [...] We sang Irish songs’.<sup>1</sup> Indeed a short time later, as the men marched to chapel ‘our pipers played *The Wearing of the Green*’<sup>2</sup>, a tune that expresses both pro-Irish nationalist and anti-British sentiments. What is important to consider at this point is that MacGill chose to be in a regiment with close links to Ireland. As a volunteer he could have enlisted in any unit within the British army but, like Liam O’Flaherty, who fought in the Irish Guards, MacGill picked a regiment whose identity was closely tied to Ireland’s cultural heritage.

Although a member of the L.I.R., in *The Amateur Army* - a text describing his initial infantry training in St. Albans, England - MacGill presents an apparent contradiction in his self-identity:

we British are one of the most military nations in the world. I have learned to love my new life, obey my officers, and depend upon my rifle; for I am Rifleman Patrick MacGill of the Irish Rifles, where rumour has it that the Colonel and I are the only two *real* Irishmen in the battalion.<sup>3</sup>

On the one hand Patrick MacGill’s use of the plural pronoun clearly indicates a sense of belonging he felt toward Britain yet he emphasises his Irish nationality in the text itself on the other. Connected with this is the author’s ‘love’ for his wartime occupation, although only in training at this point. What is significant about this idea, it is argued here, is his enjoyment of the role. This notion is strengthened by an unpublished letter in which MacGill expresses the following to his pre-war employer, Canon John Neale Dalton:

in my navvying days I would consider life under white city [*sic*] conditions a veritable paradise. There’s something clean and vital about life here; the early morning rise (6 o’clock) the wash, the ten minutes run around the parade room before breakfast [...] It’s fine bracing and exhilarating.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon* (Charleston: Bibliobazar, 2007), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Amateur Army*, (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1915), p. 2. Buildings from the 1908 Olympic Games, held in White City, London, were used to house and train soldiers.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick MacGill, Letter to Canon Dalton ?/11/1914, held in the unpublished archive of Canon John Neale Dalton at Worcester College, University of Oxford: Folio Misc.9, Ms.361.

The author continues that such an existence does, however, have one drawback: ‘we’ve got to [...] salute officers’.<sup>1</sup> This letter illustrates how MacGill enjoyed the physical side of soldiering; being outside is ‘bracing and exhilarating’, and not as demanding as his ‘navvy days’. However the act of saluting officers, and what it represents – such as respect for the King’s rank and, it can be suggested, the notion of class distinction, as a working class man the author must ‘obey’ others of a higher status - introduces a degree of ambivalence into the views MacGill expressed in *The Amateur Army*.

Patrick MacGill’s inclusion in the same letter of the phrase ‘navvy days’ together with describing how in the army he is required to ‘salute officers’ brings together two aspects of life that relate to all three Irish soldier-writers: army hierarchy and capitalism, specifically the inequality that was apparent within a capitalist system. During the First World War the British army, as it has been throughout its history, was a hierarchical organisation. Its structure extended from the private soldier, the lowest rank, held by each of the three Irish soldier-writers, to the highest officer, a Field Marshal.<sup>2</sup>

There existed a divide in the army between men in the ranks and officers. In times of peace one generally joined a regiment, and stayed within for one’s career, as either a member of the ranks or as an officer. To be commissioned from the ranks was, in peacetime, an infrequent occurrence. As Christopher Moore-Bick stated in his *Playing the Game*, certainly up until 1916 when the high casualty figures among junior officers brought about a rethink in recruitment policy, officers were recruited from a particular social milieu: ‘Thousands [of officers] were drawn from the middle and upper classes of Edwardian society. Brought up according to an ethos which was substantially unchanged since its creation in the Victorian

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> In broad terms the structure was as follows: the ranks were made up of private, corporal, sergeant, colour sergeant, Warrant Officer Class I and II – although they were still seen to be ‘in the ranks’, despite having the title of officer. The officer ranks were: Second Lieutenant, First Lieutenant, Captain, Major, Colonel, General and Field Marshal.

public schools'.<sup>1</sup> Each officer, even when serving in frontline trenches, had, as Peter Parker stated in *The Old Lie*, 'a soldier-servant who acted as a sort of military valet/cum/cook'.<sup>2</sup> The differences for life experienced as by officers and men were stark: the former had dug-outs that offered a degree of warmth and protection, the latter 'holes scooped out in the trench walls'.<sup>3</sup> Officer's uniforms were tailored made while the men's were 'ill-fitting' and they wore 'clod-hopping boots'.<sup>4</sup> Even the food was different: 'officers frequently ate well' whereas those in the ranks were given food Parker describes as of a quality now served to 'dogs'.<sup>5</sup>

While there was a duplication of the civilian pre-war class divide in the military, what the First World War did bring about, through necessity due to casualty rates, was a softening of such rigid divisions as men from the ranks, some of them working-class, were commissioned. One such man, mention in the Introduction, was the Roman Catholic Irishman John Lucy who having joined the army in pre-war days as a private was promoted from Sergeant to Second Lieutenant in 1917. Thus while the military hierarchy was, it can be suggested, run along civilian class divisions, in wartime necessity dictated that experienced and able working-class men from the ranks did bridge the gap to become officers. As the war progressed one can note that a degree of fluidity entered the rank structure presenting promotion opportunities that may not have otherwise been open to working-class men, be that in peacetime civilian or military life.

If one considers a capitalist labour market one can note a similarity with the military hierarchy. Indeed this is exactly how Karl Marx in his *Capital* described the relationship between such workers and owners: 'An industrial army of workmen under the command of a

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Moore-Bick, *Playing the Game: The British Junior Infantry Officer on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Solihull: Helion and Company, 2011), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London: Constable, 1987), p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.163.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.164.

capitalist, requires, like a real army, officers (managers) and N.C.O.s (foreman, overlookers), who command during the labour process in the name of capital'.<sup>1</sup> In such a system advancement is often not possible for the worker as individuals are denied a fair share of profits because of their exclusion from owning the means of production.

Inequality occurs because the working class men and women employed by the business owner continue to work for the same wage despite the fact that their efforts enable the generation of profit. In capitalism the capitalist has exclusive rights to the property, from which they derive profit, and, it can be suggested, would not readily distribute an even share of the revenue to their workers as this would run counter to the notion of the maximisation of wealth. Regardless of talent, experience or hard work the inherent inequality in the capitalist system is this lack of change for the worker against the continued creation of wealth by the owner of the means of production.

Richard Peet, in his 'Inequality and Poverty: A Marxist-Geographic Theory', stated that: '[t]he Marxist view is that inequality is inherent within the capitalist mode of production'.<sup>2</sup> Peet goes on to argue that not only is such inequality inherent it is actually inevitable and that 'powerholders have a vested interest in preserving social inequality'.<sup>3</sup> Even though the hierarchy of the British army was rigidly graded by its rank system the notion of inequality, such as exists within a capitalist market, was not, in wartime, so apparent. Promotion for working-class men was available, in peacetime, to those such as John Lucy who demonstrated leadership skills and experience to advance from Private to sergeant. Due to wartime conditions, it was possible for working class men in the ranks, again men such as John Lucy, to bridge the divide and to become an officer.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Power, Volume One*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 450. 'N.C.O.s' are non-commissioned officers, corporals or sergeants, who, although holding a supervisory position, are considered to be in the ranks.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Peet, 'Inequality and Poverty: A Marxist-Geographic Theory' in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (December 1975), p. 564.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



Intriguingly the letter referred to above in which Patrick MacGill refers to having to ‘salute officers’ compounds in a further, but slightly different manner, an apparent contradiction in relation to MacGill’s attitude to the ‘British’ establishment. The paper on which MacGill wrote this letter was a standard issue to soldiers, provided to them by the Y.M.C.A. and includes the header ‘For God For King and For Country’.<sup>1</sup> On MacGill’s letter a person has heavily scored this phrase out using a pencil. It would appear to be the same item used to compose the correspondence, and as such it is reasonable to assume that it was an act carried out by the author.

MacGill’s letter demonstrates, it is argued, a more nuanced understanding of his place within the army than that suggested by David Taylor’s ‘Blood, Mud and Futility? Patrick MacGill and the Experience of the Great War’. Taylor stated that MacGill ‘felt no contradiction [...] between being Irish and a member of the British army’. Taylor goes on to note that ‘MacGill quickly developed pride in his new role as a rifleman’.<sup>2</sup> While it is accepted that MacGill, and also James Hanley and Liam O’Flaherty, expressed ‘no [public] contradiction’ between nationality and profession, indeed all three enlisted, this thesis diverges from the work of Taylor due to the uncovering of MacGill’s letter. *The Amateur Army* is a text formed by the compilation of numerous newspaper articles, edited by the publisher Herbert Jenkins but written by MacGill for the public to read. Thus, it is argued in this thesis, Patrick MacGill was a war writer who kept the marketplace, even during the conflict, in mind. The letter quoted above, however, is private and, it can be suggested, likely a truer reflection of the author’s feelings. MacGill was happy in his new ‘role’, but that was as much connected with the ‘bracing’ nature of physical work as it was less demanding than ‘navvying’. MacGill, however, was uncomfortable with ‘saluting’ officers, with possible

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> David Taylor, pp.237-239.

connotations to a working class man of subservience due to class, and he apparently scored out the three tenets central to a man's place within the British military: 'For God For King and For Country'. These cumulatively illustrate a degree of contradiction between the author's identification with Britain, together with notions such as patriotism, and his Irish nationality. As such, it is argued, one can note a more nuanced reading of Patrick MacGill's place within the army, one with a public viewpoint, possibly fashioned to assist with the publication of literary work, and a private one whose position was perhaps at odds with many of his comrades in the London Irish Rifles.

### **The Similarity of Working Conditions in Peacetime and War**

A further understanding of Patrick MacGill's complex and ambivalent relationship to the war emerges through the author's portrayal of work undertaken by private soldiers, an activity which, for him, changed as the conflict progressed. At this point reference is made to MacGill's poem, 'After the War' (1916), in which he expresses the view 'For I'm a British soldier/With a British soldier's pay'.<sup>1</sup> This idea of MacGill being paid to be in the army, and the idea of payment including royalties received from writing articles and books about the war, underpins this discussion because, it is argued, such a notion, working for money rather than any ideological motivator, is central to understanding the Irishman's connection to the conflict.

MacGill had been used to hard, manual labour from an early age. Expelled from school at ten for striking his teacher MacGill, until the age of twelve, was sent by his father 'to work for the neighbours who required help at the seed-time or harvest. Sixpence a day was [the] wages'.<sup>2</sup> At twelve, due to circumstances bordering on destitution, MacGill was sent by his parents to a hiring fair in Strabane, County Tyrone where, as research for this

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, 'After the War' in *Soldier Songs* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1916), p. 111, lines 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2005), p. 18.

thesis has uncovered, he described how he was sold into ‘a crude form of slavery’.<sup>1</sup> MacGill was effectively bought and sold several times while working on farms in the Irish midlands.

One can note that MacGill’s early years were formed by his family’s position in society because, in the words of Marx and Engels - which shaped MacGill’s later socialist position - the young Patrick was ‘reduced to selling [his own] labour power in order to live’.<sup>2</sup> From Strabane, realising he could only earn money through manual labour, MacGill continued to pursue this path in Scotland during his teenage years in order to send money home to his family.

At the heart of MacGill’s identity, from an early age, is the reality of being forced to undertake manual work in order to earn money. MacGill, at just twelve, realised that ‘I was a Glenmornan man, and I couldn’t have it said that any man left me behind in the work of the fields [...] The pride of it pulled me through my toil [...]’.<sup>3</sup> It is argued that the word ‘pride’, used in connection with ‘toil’, is central to the idea that for MacGill work was a cornerstone of his self-identity, expressed in his war memoir, *The Great Push*, as ‘[the] code of self-respect’.<sup>4</sup> It is this notion that, as will emerge, presents a reading of Patrick MacGill’s war writing that differs from that of David Taylor who, as discussed in the Introduction, viewed the Irish soldier’s depiction of the conflict in terms that Taylor described as being ‘heroic, even glorious’.<sup>5</sup> MacGill was undoubtedly heroic, as demonstrated by his actions on the battlefield. He was an infantryman and stretcher-bearer going into action at the opening moment of the Battle of Loos, but Taylor qualifies his use of the term by stating that it referred to ‘high abstractions’ more commonly associated with public school-educated

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, ‘Interview with Patrick MacGill’ in *The Windsor, Eton and Slough Express*, 15 February 1913, p. 8. Archive of Canon John Neale Dalton, Misc.9, Ms.361.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 219.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000), p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> David Taylor, ‘From Fighting the War to Writing the War: From Glory to Guilt?’, p. 294.

officers'.<sup>1</sup> An understanding of just what those 'high abstractions' were can be found in Peter Parker's *The Old Lie*, where he states:

By the time the Great War was declared, notions of chivalry and patriotic duty combined with the various other elements of the public-school ethos to inspire a generation. The sacrifice of self-interest to the welfare of the community reaches its apotheosis as young men marched straight out of the school gates into a commission and the trenches [...] the Great War [was] regarded as a knightly quest.<sup>2</sup>

Patrick MacGill, it is argued, on no occasion expressed such views and, as such, they did not form part of his identity or contribute to his depiction of the war. What was tied closely to the author's sense of military self-identity was his portrayal of the role of an infantryman as the performance of manual labour for which he was paid.

From a young age Patrick MacGill derived a sense of personal identity from his ability to perform physically demanding work. The conditions the teenage MacGill endured are described in *Children of the Dead End* through the first person character Dermot Flynn:

Daily we laboured together, and the men bent almost double over their graips [forks], throwing out the potatoes to the girls who followed after, dragging their bodies through the mire and muck like wounded animals [...] One night when we were asleep in a barn the rain came through the roof and flooded the earthen floor to a depth of several inches. Our beds being wet through, we had to rise and stand for the remainder of the night knee-deep in cold water.<sup>3</sup>

Although published two months prior to the outbreak of war the passage above shares similarities of imagery and tone with MacGill's wartime memoir, *The Red Horizon*, in which the author noted that, as a private soldier he was in 'barn billets'<sup>4</sup> while on another occasion MacGill is required to make contact with comrades on the frontline:

The trench was wet and slobbery, every hole was a pitfall to trap the unwary [...] The rain was pelting with a merciless vigour, and loose earth was falling from the sides of the trench [...] The rain still fell and the moon – there was a bit of it somewhere – never showed itself through the close-packed clouds. For a while I struggled bravely

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London: Constable, 1987), p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon*, p. 173.

to keep to the tight-rope path, but it was useless, I fell over first to one side, then the other. Eventually I kept clear of it, and walked in the slush of the field.<sup>1</sup>

In both passages, as a peacetime labourer and wartime soldier, MacGill is living in identical buildings, ‘barn[s]’, while each extract conveys a sense of the physical struggle against difficult conditions: the ‘mire and muck’ in Scotland is akin to the ‘wet and slobbery’ trench in France while the potato pickers ‘[drag] their bodies’ in a manner similar to Private MacGill, ‘struggl[ing]’ in the face of ‘merciless’ rain and settling for the ‘slush of the field’ as an easier route. In each passage the human body is pitted against the environment as nature serves to make challenging already physically arduous tasks. Imagery such as that depicted by MacGill in the initial extract also appears in the later war literature of other soldier-writers: Wilfred Owen in his poem ‘DULCE ET DECORUM EST’ describes men at the frontline ‘Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,/Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge’.<sup>2</sup> The similarity between MacGill’s and Owen’s imagery is striking, made increasingly powerful when one considers the context of MacGill, a child in peacetime.

### **The Similarity of Work in Peacetime and War**

As has been demonstrated the conditions in which the pre-war MacGill laboured were similar to the trenches, and, as can be noted below, firstly as portrayed in *Children of the Dead End*, followed by *The Great Push*, so was the nature of that work:

Down in the cuttings men were labouring on the night-shift: gutting out the bowels of the mountain places, and forcing their way through the fastness steadily, slowly, surely. I could hear the dynamite exploding, and shattering to pieces the rock in which it was lodged [...] Down in the cuttings I could see my mates toiling amidst the broken earth, the sharp ledges of hewn-rock, and the network of gang-planks and straining derricks that rose all around them [...] men dropped frozen stiff in the trenches where they laboured.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, pp. 169 and 173.

<sup>2</sup> Wilfred Owen, ‘DULCE ET DECORUM EST’ in *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. by Jon Stallworthy (London: Chatto and Windus, 2002), p. 117, lines 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, pp. 236 and 244.

We were going to dig a sap out from the front trench towards the German lines; we drew our spades and shovels for the work from the Engineers' store at the rear and made our way into the labyrinth of trenches [we] had to dig some two hundred and fifty yards of trench three feet wide and six feet deep before dawn [...] the safety of a man so often depends upon the dexterous handling of the spade; the deeper the man digs, the better his shelter from bomb and bullet; the spade is the key to safety. The men set to work eagerly, one picked up the earth with a spade and a mate shovelled the loose stuff out over the meadow.<sup>1</sup>

The latter is from MacGill's memoir *The Great Push*, where the author seems to be rather understated by simply recording that the soldiers 'drew our spades and shovel'. A similar scenario, as described by the Irish soldier Private A. R. Read to William Sheehan and retold in *The Western Front: Irish Voices from the Great War* portrays how, in a working party: 'Each man was loaded up like a pack mule. Trench boards, sandbags, barbed wire, stakes, picks and shovels besides rifles and a canvas bandolier of ammunition'.<sup>2</sup> Read and MacGill describe similar events but the former expands on it by likening the Irish working class soldiers to beasts of burden and thereby becoming, in the eyes of the military, something less than human. In MacGill's extract the converse is true as the men set to work 'eagerly', perhaps to get the job done before 'dawn' and avoid becoming obvious targets, but also maybe through a realisation that their efforts will provide them, and their comrades, 'shelter from bomb and bullet'.

On three occasions in the short passage from his war memoir MacGill uses the word 'dig', a term that connotes a sense of labouring and connects with the notion of 'gutting out the bowels' of the mountain in *Children of the Dead End*. There is also a sense of the prophetic in this earlier peacetime description because it is suggestive of the injury inflicted by the use of a bayonet, a prominent image in MacGill's writing. Both passages contain oblique suggestions of death, the notion of disembowelling in the pre-war novel and in *The*

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> William Sheehan, *The Western Front: Irish Voices from the Great War* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2011), p. 69.

*Great Push* through the dimensions of the trench: it is approximately the same height and width as a grave, as MacGill's reference to a trench being 'a grave unfilled...' <sup>1</sup> implies. *Children of the Dead End* foreshadowed MacGill's wartime imagery in a further, more chilling manner: 'the trenches' being dug by the civilian navvies were also places into which men 'dropped frozen stiff' - thereby becoming a kind of burial site, or a 'grave [un]filled'. The two passages remind one of the photographs included in the opening pages of this thesis as a connection through location, 'trenches', and manual labour, between navvies and Irish soldiers, is clearly apparent.

In the extract from *The Great Push*, through the persona of the narrator using the first person plural, there is suggestion that MacGill not only identifies with the soldiers but is communicating first-hand knowledge of manual labour and the value of such experience in the context of war, where the 'dexterous' spade could be critical. Here Patrick MacGill highlights the importance of manual work and the attendant physical skill in the war, providing an insight into the work of an infantryman over and above that directly connected with fighting. Thus if one considers how MacGill, through the character of Dermot Flynn, expressed 'pride' in physical work, here in *The Great Push* MacGill's idea of his own personal 'code' can be applied to the same type of work and, as such, permits one to consider that an aspect of the author's ambivalence to the war is predicated upon the notion that some of what was required from a working-class soldier was not new to an ex-navvy such as Patrick McGill.

Furthermore, in the passage from *The Great Push* one can note the apparent change in function required of privates in the army, as soldiers such as Patrick MacGill oscillated at different moments in the war between working as a combatant and labourer. This notion of the interchangeability of roles is expressed by the author in *Moleskin Joe*, noted in the

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push*, p. 214.

Introduction, as illustrative of a further connection between the images of Irish soldiers and navvies: '[changing] uniform, khaki for moleskin, and puttees for knee-straps, supplant[ing] the shovels with the sword, the pick-axe with the rifle'.<sup>1</sup> There are connections to be made between the navy and soldier on many levels: both are recognisable by their clothing as each, to some degree, wear uniforms, both groups carry similar items of personal equipment, 'shovels', and there is an interchange of work-roles: navvies become soldiers upon the outbreak of war but then, because of their rank, private soldiers are required to become navvies in order to dig trenches.

At this point the prominence of work permits a connection to be made between the Irish soldier-writers and working-class combatants from other countries, specifically the French soldier-writers Gabriel Chevallier and Henri Barbusse. Chevallier who was a *poilu*, a private in the French army, described in his memoir *La Peur (Fear)* (1930): 'We were used as navies [*sic*], repairing old trenches for a new offensive [...] Our military function was limited to the role of navies working under fire, exposed and passive [...] the navies of war, and they know that the only person who profits from their labour is the boss'.<sup>2</sup> The idea of repairing old trenches for the 'new offensive' is suggestive of a degree of repetition, work being undertaken by the laboring soldiers for an apparently purposeless activity, such as is contained in the notions of 'old trenches' and 'new offensive'.

Chevallier's use of the term navy - or 'navy' on occasion, in Malcom Imrie's translation - to describe the *poilus* enables a wider point to be made in relation to the role of private soldiers in war: the author notes that the men could be viewed as 'navies [*sic*]' even when they were 'under fire'. Chevallier, it is argued, is using the term disparagingly because he is articulating what he considered to be the view of the high command, those who

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Moleskin Joe*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Chevallier, *Fear* trans. by Malcolm Imrie (London: Serpent's Tail, 2011), pp.31, 43 and 160. Chevallier's novel was banned in France until 2011 having previously been viewed as seditious.



determine the ‘military function’: as discussed earlier, the men exist within a hierarchical entity, similar to the capitalist system, and are merely physical labour to be used by those in authority.

The French soldier-writer Henri Barbusse, in his *Le Feu (Under Fire)* (1916), also described the labouring tasks undertaken by the *poilus*:

“Every man,” they say to us, “must dig five feet in length, two and a half feet in width, and two and three quarter feet in depth. That makes fifteen feet in length for each team. And I advise you to get into it; the sooner it’s done the sooner you’ll leave.”

The place becomes unwholesome, we stoop and crouch, and some are scratching at the earth on their knees. Others are working full length; they toil, and turn, and turn again, like men in nightmares. The earth, whose first layer was light to lift, becomes muddy and sticky; it’s hard to handle, and clings to the tool like glue. And every shovelful the blade must be scrapped.<sup>1</sup>

Again, as Patrick MacGill detailed in *The Great Push*, exact measurements are provided to the men: their physical labour must achieve a set aim. In the passage above, however, Barbusse leaves unsaid an aspect of the men’s work: what is ‘unwholesome’?

To address this question it is appropriate to consider a further extract from *Under Fire*:

A procession of shovel-bearers advances along the battled trench. They have an order to shovel the earth into the relics of the trenches, to stop everything up, so that the bodies may be buried on the spot. Thus these helmeted warriors will here perform the work of the redresser of wrongs as they restore full shape to the fields and make level the cavities already half filled by cargoes of invaders.<sup>2</sup>

A sense of irony is apparent in the term ‘shovel-bearers’ because, in the context of war, one is often presented with the phrase ‘stretcher-bearer’, and with it an attendant sense of hope for a wounded man. In this passage Barbusse offers no such comfort because the labourers are a burial party: the trenches, MacGill’s ‘unfilled graves’, are now depicted by Barbusse as being filled with the dead. The message in this passage is clear: the dead soldiers have perished for

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire* trans. by Fitzwater Wray (London: Dent and Sons, 1917), pp. 312-313.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 270.

nothing, and it is they who have made the ground ‘unwholesome’; it is not a sanctified cemetery. The men’s labour will restore the battlefield to an earlier state, as though nothing has taken place. In the texts of these working class soldiers war is presented as being a repetitive activity - ‘they toil, and turn, and turn again, like men in nightmares’ - a task devoid of purpose as the work of the ‘shovel’ quite literally covers up the toll exacted by the ‘guns’. The latter often induced ‘nightmares’ in soldiers forcing the men to re-live traumatic experiences, as will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to MacGill’s novel *Fear!* Thus working class men such as MacGill, Chevallier and Barbusse are required to physically and psychologically bury the evidence of trauma.

At this point it is appropriate to again consider David Taylor’s argument that Patrick MacGill presented in his war writing ‘a heroic, even glorious interpretation’ of the conflict.<sup>1</sup> Taylor argues that this idea of the ‘heroic’ is based upon two elements, ‘a collective [and] an individual element (the romance of the rifleman)’.<sup>2</sup> It is agreed that MacGill described how he was a member of a ‘collective’, such as the appeal to the author, expressed in *The Amateur Army*, of being included within ‘the onward movement of a thousand men in full marching order’.<sup>3</sup> However the idea of ‘romance’ in the life of a working class soldier is one that is countered in this thesis, beginning with the extracts above because they highlight the dire conditions in which soldiers such as Patrick MacGill lived and worked. The notion of ‘romance’ to which Taylor alludes is considered in this thesis to be a soldier’s feeling of chivalry, self-sacrifice and adventure toward his role in the conflict, none of which Patrick MacGill attributes to himself. MacGill’s war writing is akin to that of his peacetime narrative, *Children of the Dead End*, in that there is depicted a sense of continuity between

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<sup>1</sup> David Taylor, ‘From Fighting the War to Writing the War: From Glory to Guilt?’, p. 294.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 298.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Amateur Army*, p. 31.

the two, predicated upon shared locations. In both there is ‘mire and muck’, hard manual labour and a sense of exploitation of navvies and soldiers based upon class and social status.

### **The Role of Fighting For Patrick MacGill In Peace And War**

What has been considered up to this point is the notion of army work as labour, the fulfilling of manual tasks on the frontline using items directly transposable from peacetime, like shovels or picks. What happens, however, when combat itself is viewed as labour or in the context of the experience of labour, as it was to some extent by the writers under examination in this thesis? MacGill’s texts construct a degree of continuity between the violent conflicts and organized brawls of his pre-war working life and the physical combat involved in the war, despite the different contexts of these kinds of violence.

In *Children of the Dead End* Patrick MacGill described how fighting was viewed as an integral part of navvy life. Pre-arranged fights between the labourers were described by MacGill, through Dermot Flynn, in vocabulary replete with military connotations: the bouts were considered to be ‘the coming battle’<sup>1</sup>; individual men were ‘combatants’ (CDE/218); and the beaten opponent was the ‘fallen enemy’ (157), upon whom one inflicted ‘wound[s]’ (214).

Fighting is presented by MacGill as something more than simply a pastime undertaken by the men: MacGill’s character views fighting as not only enjoyable but a skill. As Flynn narrated ‘[t]o me a fight was something I looked forward to for days’ (197): it was an activity which engendered a sense of personal, masculine and group identity. In so doing, however, it could seem to endorse the stereotype of Irish pugnacity. MacGill himself invokes this association, about which the text maintains a certain structural equivocation:

as a true Irishman, I could have spent all day long looking at fights (206).

By instinct I am a fighter. I never shirk a fight, and the most violent contest is a tonic to my soul. Sometimes when in a thoughtful mood I said to myself that fighting

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 208.

was the pastime of a brute or savage. I said that because it is fashionable for the majority of people, spineless and timid as they are, to say the same. But fighting is not the pastime of a brute; it is the stern reality of a brute's life. Only by fighting will the fittest survive. (218)

MacGill appears to view fighting as a facet of what it is to be an Irish man, almost, in this depiction, an innate quality. This notion, as outlined in the Introduction, was one to which men such as John Redmond M.P alluded in their desire to recruit Irishmen into the British army. Redmond stated in his Woodenbridge Speech: 'It is a duty more than that of taking care that Irish valour proves itself on the field of war, as it has always proved itself in the past.'<sup>1</sup> The martial qualities of Irishmen were recognised both on a wider social level, such as in Redmond's 'Woodenbridge Speech', and individually as MacGill's war memoirs exemplify.

Apparent in the extracts above is MacGill's ambivalence about the appetite for fighting: on the one hand there is pride in his personal ability to fight, which connects with a larger group identity, but there is also articulated the idea that the author is having to make a virtue out of necessity, a position forced upon him due to the 'brute's life' into which he was born. When it comes to the idea of combat in war, however, MacGill is ironically far more circumspect. In *The Red Horizon*, on the troopship from Southampton to France, MacGill contemplates the future: 'Did I think three years ago that I should ever be a soldier?' I asked myself. 'Now that I am, can I kill a man; run a bayonet through his body; right through, so that the point, blood red and cruelly keen, comes out at the back? I'll not think of it'.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere in Patrick MacGill's war writing does the author portray himself as actually fighting the enemy, let alone killing, a fact important to the next chapter's discussion of the author's novel *Fear!* It is argued that MacGill's idea of fighting was one that connected with

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<sup>1</sup> John Redmond, 'Speech at Woodenbridge', [www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/redmond](http://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/redmond) [Accessed 16/03/2017].

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon*, p. 14.

his 'code of respect' in that he would 'never shirk a fight'. A fist fight between two men was unquestionably an event that MacGill relished, but that was a test of the author's physical skill; it was an act that testified to MacGill's 'fit[ness] to survive'. To kill a man, however, was a deed about which MacGill would 'not think' but, crucially, he does not 'shirk' from the idea.

David Taylor, in his essay 'Blood, Mud and Futility? Patrick MacGill and the Experience of the Great War', uses a passage from *The Great Push* to demonstrate how MacGill built 'an identity cast in a more heroic mould to withstand the pressures of events' (243), such as bayonetting a man. The passage to which Taylor refers is detailed below:

All men have some restraining influence to help them in hours of trial, some principle or some illusion. Duty, patriotism, vanity and dreams come to the help of men in the trenches, all illusions probably, ephemeral and fleeting, but for a man as ephemeral and fleeting as his illusions are, he can lay his back against them and defy death and the terrors of the world. But let him stand naked and looking at the staring reality of the terrors that engirt him and he becomes a raving lunatic.<sup>1</sup>

There are two aspects of this passage that are significant for Patrick McGill presenting an identity that is 'heroic': firstly it is written in the third person, although *The Great Push* is a first person memoir, and as such, it can be suggested that the author is somewhat distanced for the general sentiments expressed.

Further, the points MacGill outlines above must be viewed in the context of the preceding three sentences. Patrick MacGill is writing of an artillery bombardment he experienced and in which he depicts his own 'restraining influence[s]'. These are, on the one hand, 'a self-satisfying confidence in my own invulnerability', as the author believed that he would remain 'untouched'; however:

[at] other times [...] I accommodated myself to the Olympian uproar [...] I had got beyond that mean where the soul of a man swings like a pendulum from fear to indifference, and from indifference to fear. In danger I am never indifferent, but I find that I can readily adapt myself to the moods and tempers from my environment.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push*, p 84.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

This passage is in the first person and is the sentence immediately prior to the extract used by Taylor. Here Patrick MacGill's 'restraining influence' is that of self-reliance. It is argued that MacGill is not being 'heroic' in a sense that is connected to notions of 'Duty [or] patriotism', which is what Taylor is suggesting and which are tenets espoused by many in England, as discussed earlier in this chapter. MacGill's 'influence' is himself; he draws upon an inner strength, the ability to 'adapt' is an 'instinct' which is a trait the author began to develop, it can be suggested, in his peacetime life as a child labourer, a fighting navy and then a soldier.

This thesis will now return to the idea of MacGill having to adapt to circumstance, such as to perhaps have to 'run a bayonet through [a man's] body'. Of the use of a bayonet Denis Winter, in his *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War*, argues: 'The capacity to fight at close quarters which [the bayonet] implied was supposed to distinguish the British with their professional traditions from the amateur Germans'.<sup>1</sup> Winter continues that '[n]o other weapon required the subduing of individual fear',<sup>2</sup> a process that was undertaken through hard, repetitive work. This element of training was carried out only by those in the ranks: it was a weapon, referred to by Patrick MacGill in *The Amateur Army* as 'sword [was] military name'<sup>3</sup> for use by working class men such as MacGill although, ironically, a symbol of an officer's military status was the wearing of a sword. As the Irishman John Lucy described in his memoir *There's A Devil in the Drum* (1938), upon being commissioned from the ranks: 'I took delight in my officer's kit and equipment, and in the second-hand revolver that now replaced my rifle and bayonet'.<sup>4</sup> To be ready to use such a weapon, even if the thought is not

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<sup>1</sup> Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Amateur Army*, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> John Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum* (Uckfield: Naval and Military Press, 1993), p. 365.

palatable, is an element of MacGill's 'code of self-respect', itself connected to the author's willingness to 'adapt'; it was an aspect of the work required of a private soldier.

Patrick MacGill's own lack of fear is apparent in *The Great Push*, where he describes leaving a trench, under fire, and advancing into No Man's Land:

The country around Loos was like a sponge; the god of war had stamped with his foot on it, and thousands of men, armed, ready to kill, were squirted out on to the level, barren fields of danger [...] There on the open field of death my life was out of my keeping, but the sensation of fear never entered my being. There was so much simplicity and so little effort in doing what I had done, in doing what eight hundred comrades had done, that I felt I could carry the work before me with as much credit as my code of self-respect required.<sup>1</sup>

Although trained as an infantryman MacGill, at this point in the battle, was used as a stretcher-bearer whose role was to assist the wounded, one for which he did not carry a weapon but was otherwise dressed as an infantryman.

In the extract above Patrick MacGill directly equates the task he is undertaking with 'work' and he does so accompanied by the phrase 'my code of self-respect'. This phrase, it is argued, encapsulates two vital elements of MacGill's writing to this point: firstly, it describes his commitment to his comrades. Not only is he advancing toward the enemy, together with fellow soldiers, but he is also there as one who can help those who are injured. Further, his work is underpinned by an alternative 'code' to that of patriotism: although it also involves potential sacrifice, it has a conspicuously practical dimension. It requires him to be there in order to provide two levels of support to fellow soldiers: the emotional and psychological bond of communal action; that of going into battle with one's comrades and friends, together with the physical support of medical aid.

There is perhaps also a slight trace, in this passage, of the attitude familiar from *Children of the Dead End*: the code whereby MacGill's narrator would 'never shirk a fight'. The notion of continuity manifests itself in different ways in MacGill's war writing in terms

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push*, p. 34.

of the broad similarities between navy and soldier, and here from a personal perspective. In his war memoirs the mind-set required to enter into the fights of *Children of the Dead End* displays itself in his facing the enemy's firepower with the prospect of coming into direct contact with an opposing soldier. His peacetime working-class existence fostered a certain status and value in fighting which, in wartime, manifested itself in terms such as Redmond described as 'Irish valour'; a sentiment shorn of ideological aspects like patriotism or duty, as are often found in British accounts of the conflict. Although fighting was very much a part of MacGill's pre-war Irish working class identity, upon getting to the frontline he did, however, demonstrate a degree of ambivalence over the idea of having to fight in order to kill. This idea is considered again later in the chapter but within a different context, one of empathy toward an enemy combatant predicated upon a shared connection with Roman Catholicism. It is aspects such as these that contribute to the sense of MacGill's war writing differing from that of the officers.

### **Writing As Work**

A further aspect of Patrick MacGill's life that he considered to be work was writing. Prior to the outbreak of war MacGill had been a journalist in London, a career he had begun by writing newspaper articles about navy life in Kinlochleven, Scotland. MacGill's writing, both as a navy and then a soldier, was a task he carried out side-by-side with labouring and the varied tasks of an infantryman. However, this was not without potential problems:

My success as a writer discomfited me a little even. I felt at first that I was committing some sin against my mates. I was working on a shift which they did not understand; and men look with suspicion on things beyond their comprehension. A man may make money at a fight, a gaming table, or at a shift, but the man who made money with a dirty pencil and a dirty piece of paper was an individual who had no place in my mates' scheme of things.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, p. 238.



MacGill was not ostracised by his 'mates' but he does illustrate the notion that writing of his experiences did, to a degree, place him outside of the group.

This notion of separation continued for him in the military. In *The Amateur Army* MacGill relates how, when given free time, he would frequent a local cafe where '[I did] most of my writing [...] catching snatches of conversation and reminiscence as they float across to me'.<sup>1</sup> In *The Red Horizon* the author similarly records the solitary occupation of writing: 'As I write I am in a dug-out built in the open by the French'<sup>2</sup> an occupation that his friend, Private Bill Teake, is unhappy about, stating on another occasion that 'yer spent 'arf the time writin' when yer should have been peelin' potatoes' (134). Later, in his interwar war novel *Fear!* the narrator, Private Arthur Ryder, is portrayed as writing 'alone', detached from his comrades as again he 'closely observes'<sup>3</sup> the men, and events, around him.

Patrick MacGill's work as a writer of his war experiences is another example of his complex relationship to the conflict. Due to his class MacGill both identifies with, but is distanced from, the experiences he portrays as he is simultaneously a navvy or soldier and writer. This places him in a position different from the officer-writers due, in a large part, to the fact that men such as Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves wrote memoirs years after the war. MacGill the soldier-writer views his output very much as war work. An examination of MacGill's unpublished letters, and his legal contracts now held in the Random House Group archive, has revealed for the first time his focus, even from the trenches, upon the payment he received for this work. This is typified by the following comment, in a letter of 1915 to Canon Dalton: 'Working against great difficulties I made £300 out of the Red Horizon (*sic*), as newspaper articles in three months and if it were published in book form I hope to be able

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Amateur Army*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon*, p. 124.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Fear!* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1921), p. 9.

to make as much or more by the volume'.<sup>1</sup> It can be noted that this acquisition of money far in excess of what his friends were earning would have distanced MacGill further from his comrades, navy or soldier.

In his memoir *An Irish Navy* Donall Mac Amhlaigh portrayed a similar experience of separation. While living with other Irish labourers Mac Amhlaigh described how: 'I've no comfort at all writing this [diary] in the boarding house, somehow, and I had to say to one of the lodgers in the end that I was writing an urgent letter home'.<sup>2</sup> There is an interesting dichotomy that carries forward from MacGill's peacetime writing to that of the conflict, and is apparent in Mac Amhlaigh's later text: the process of composition distances the men from the perspective of the navy or soldier yet MacGill remains within the roles and builds an identity out of them in his writing. This position makes them both flaunt and justify their role, which is a characteristic of the experience of the working class writer, one who is concurrently writing of his peers as a member within the group, but distanced from them by that very act of writing.

### **Private Patrick MacGill An Irish émigré**

In fighting Patrick MacGill was, like most soldiers in the British army, in exile because he was away from home but, unlike Englishmen such as Siegfried Sassoon or Robert Graves, MacGill was three steps removed from his country of birth: he had travelled from Ireland to Scotland as a child labourer, then to England as a navy, and then onto France as a soldier. Thus his view of home and the psychological strength and solace it offered is, it is argued, gained through the prism of prolonged separation. This is further complicated because men such as the officer-writers visited home on leave, a process that became incrementally personally more difficult for them as the war progressed because of the disparity between life

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, letter to Canon Dalton, 14/11/1915. In a letter to Dalton dated 02/01/1917 MacGill noted that as books *The Red Horizon* and *The Great Push* each made £2000: approximately £310,000 a century later.

<sup>2</sup> Donall Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navy: The Diary of an Exile* trans. by Valentin Iremonger (Cork: The Collins Press, 2008), p. 27.

in England and the trenches. However, unlike MacGill, who as a private did not travel to Ireland during the conflict, the officers did at least get home.

Micheal Mac Craith and Michelle Macleod, in 'Home and exile: A comparison of the poetry of Martin O Direain and Ruairaidh MacThomais', note that '[o]ne of the most dominant themes in the Gaelic literary tradition of the past one and a half thousand years is exile [often] through 'rose tinted spectacles'.<sup>1</sup> In *The Red Horizon*, an incident involving a dead Irish soldier, identifiable by his uniform and a set of rosary beads around his neck, prompts MacGill to reflect upon home:

[In] my mind [I] saw in a vivid picture a barefooted boy going over the hills of Corrymeela to morning mass, with his beads in his hand. On either side rose the thatched cabin of the peasantry, the peat smoke curling from the chimneys, the boreens running through the bushes, the brown Irish bogs, the heather in blossom, the turf stacks, the laughing colleens...<sup>2</sup>

MacGill is presenting an idealised and nostalgic view of home, apparent in the overall sense of contentment present in the phrase associated with the image of the smoke 'curling' - denoting an almost lazy, warm sense into the passage. A notion of summer is portrayed in the presence of heather and the turf stacked drying, ready for winter while a sense of childish playfulness emerges from the sense of the laughing 'colleens', a term for a girl.

The opening words to MacGill's first memoir *The Red Horizon*, written as an epigraph in the form of a three stanza poem, similarly connect with MacGill's home: 'I wish I were back again/In the glens of Donegal'.<sup>3</sup> A different poem used at the beginning of the third chapter depicts a further link to MacGill's home town:

The fog is white on Glenties moors,  
The road is grey from Glenties town,  
Oh! lone grey road and ghost-white fog,  
And ah! the homely moors of brown. (23)

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<sup>1</sup> Micheal Mac Craith and Michelle, 'Home and Exile: A Comparison of the poetry of Mairtin O Direain and Ruairaidh MacThomais' in *New Hibernia Review/Iris Eireannach Nua* (Vol. 5 No. 2 Summer, 2001), pp. 72-73.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon*, p.87.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

The initial sentence of Chapter Three of *The Red Horizon* further reinforces this image of Ireland: 'The farmhouse where we were billeted reminded me strongly of my home in Donegal with its fields and dusky evenings and its spirit of brooding quiet' (23). As one can note in these examples, MacGill depicts the innate beauty and quiet of Ireland. Although one can perhaps detect a hint of the sinister in the poem, apparent in the 'ghost-white fog', MacGill draws a sense of comfort from Ireland's very ground, the 'homely' soil. This idea will be discussed further in the final chapter, in connection with Liam O'Flaherty's *The Black Soul*, specifically in relation to writers of the Irish Literary Revival, the homecoming to Ireland of the ex-soldier Fergus O'Connor and the peasants living on the Aran islands, the author's home.

In the work discussed above MacGill is portraying to his reader the sense that the author is connected to his home through an identification with the land. However, there is arguably a degree of 'rose tinted spectacles' as the reality of MacGill's early home life was far from idyllic. This Irish identity however, and the perspective it provides, offers a particular critical and cultural take on the conflict for Patrick MacGill and, as will become apparent later in the thesis, James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty.

As has been demonstrated Patrick MacGill maintained his sense of Irish identity despite serving an organisation with close connections to the British Empire, through his depiction of Ireland in terms that, while nostalgic, demonstrate a connection that sustained him during his time in the trenches. This notion is examined further in the following chapters in relation not only MacGill's novels, *The Brown Brethren* and *Fear!*, but also in the works of James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty. As private soldiers their access to home leave was limited or indeed, for many, non-existent. Therefore idealised notions of home became a means of maintaining a psychological- and to some extent a political and aesthetic- connection with Ireland.

## Patrick MacGill and Roman Catholicism

To return to the passage discussed earlier, in which Patrick MacGill described the ‘thatched cabin [with] the peat smoke curling’, the author there interweaves a nostalgic and idealised Ireland, together with a Catholic sentiment that sits outside of any mainstream British religious and cultural framework. To begin to understand this position it is necessary to consider the significance of the image in which MacGill depicts ‘a barefooted boy going over the hills of Corrymeela to morning Mass, with his beads in his hand’.<sup>1</sup>

MacGill’s first person narrator, speaking very clearly for the author himself at this point - having previously identified himself as ‘Pat’<sup>2</sup>, while later in the text he is recognised as being ‘Pat MacGill’<sup>3</sup> by a comrade - takes the rosary as a starting point to reminisce about the childhood memories it stirs within him. In so doing MacGill permits an exploration of a further community, one that existed alongside his Irish identity: the family, a group for whom many of the men portrayed by the Irish soldier-writers are separated. As Clair Wills outlines, depictions of working-class life, such as Donall Mac Amhlaigh’s *An Irish Navvy*, ‘dealt primarily with homosocial worlds (specifically, with male gang labor) rather than with family and intergenerational community’.<sup>4</sup> As such the link with family and home was often by letter or by a shared religious tradition.

In her article ‘Attitudes to the Rosary and its performance in nineteenth and twentieth century Donegal’, Patricia Lysaght has included analysis of the significance of the rosary to Glenties, the very township in which MacGill was born, in which, as elsewhere, ‘the performance of the Rosary was a nightly, highly-structured household event’.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of the rosary, Lysaght suggests, was to pray for the welfare of the family and the community,

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon*, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> Clair Wills, ‘Realism and the Irish Immigrant: Documentary, Fiction and Postwar Irish Labor’, p. 375.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Lysaght, ‘Attitudes to the Rosary and its performance in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Donegal’ in *The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland* (Vol. 66 1998), p. 36.

in addition to being recited ‘at times of crisis’.<sup>1</sup> In MacGill’s text, through his depiction of the dead Irish soldier, with ‘a string of beads with a little shiny crucifix on the end of it [around] the dead man’s neck’<sup>2</sup>, the author conveys a message that connects with the folklore of his home country to those familiar with that symbology. MacGill is reassuring those in Ireland that the soldier had with him a means by which to practice his Catholic faith, and to be able to pray ‘at times of crisis’. Ultimately he died wearing an object upon which was the image of Christ, a fact that may have provided a degree of comfort to the bereaved.

MacGill’s writing represents a double, and indeed contradictory, use of Catholicism. On the one hand it is comforting and sustaining, kept separate from the business of war. On the other, however, as will become apparent, at key moments it either fails MacGill’s protagonist or is emptied of its promise of redemption to rhetorical effect. MacGill’s use of religion goes beyond an implicit critique of the endeavour he is involved in, to express a more universal sentiment about the horror and absurdity of war.

Patrick MacGill’s use of Catholicism is thus complicated, and perhaps undermined altogether, by the materialist and sensationalist accounts of dying and dead bodies in his work. The dead are denied burials, unlike in texts by officers such as Siegfried Sassoon who, in *Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man*, describes the process that a reader might assume to be the typical fate of the deceased. Sassoon’s close friend, the officer David Thomas (the character Dick Tiltwood in the text) is shot and killed in battle. He is then buried in the presence of Sassoon: ‘the Brigade chaplain went through his words; a flag covered all that we were there for [...] A sack was lowered into a hole in the ground. The sack was Dick.’<sup>3</sup> While certainly this is a Christian burial it is underpinned with an emerging sense of distance from the conflict on the part of Sassoon. The clause ‘a flag covered all we were there for’ is

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.39.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon*, p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (London: Faber and Faber, 1928), p. 383.

ambiguous: the material physically covers his friend but there is also, perhaps, a degree of irony in the gap between notions of patriotism and sacrifice attached to the British flag – with his closest friend, killed on active service, being reduced to the content of such a utilitarian item as ‘[a] sack’.

Siegfried Sassoon’s friend does, at least, have a burial. In *The Red Horizon*, on the other hand, MacGill records how he was in a trench, having a conversation with a soldier from the ‘sanitary squad’; a unit whose responsibility it was to re-bury the dead: ‘I told him. “The floor is soft as putty and smells vilely. Perhaps there is a dead man there. I slept by the spot and it turned me sick” [...]’.<sup>1</sup> Having dug into the ground a corpse was found and, as MacGill observed, ‘[h]e turned the thing on its back, its face up to the sky’<sup>2</sup>. At this point the soldier from the sanitary squad observed ‘[the deceased] dropped into the mud and was tramped down’.<sup>3</sup> The body was that of the soldier wearing the rosary. The dead man wore, as was required of all combatants, a British army identity disc. Yet he also carried the rosary: side by side on the man’s body there were items that marked out both his British professional and his personal Irish, Roman Catholic identities. The man is (re)-humanised by MacGill both through the descriptions of rural Ireland, discussed previously, and in religious references such as in a letter found on the Irish Fusilier’s body. The correspondence is read aloud by the ‘sanitary man’, and was from the deceased’s partner:

“Your mother and me is making the Rounds of the Cross for you (*sic*), and I am always thinking of you in my prayers [...] The socks I sent were knitted by myself, three pairs of them, and I put holy water on them [...] I’ll pray to the Holy Mother to take care of you”. (88)

The Holy Mother, the Virgin Mary, is in Roman Catholicism a maternal protector, one who nourishes children of the faith. The protection of the Virgin Mary cannot extend, however, to the context of battle, a war waged for a Protestant nation in a foreign land. This reference by

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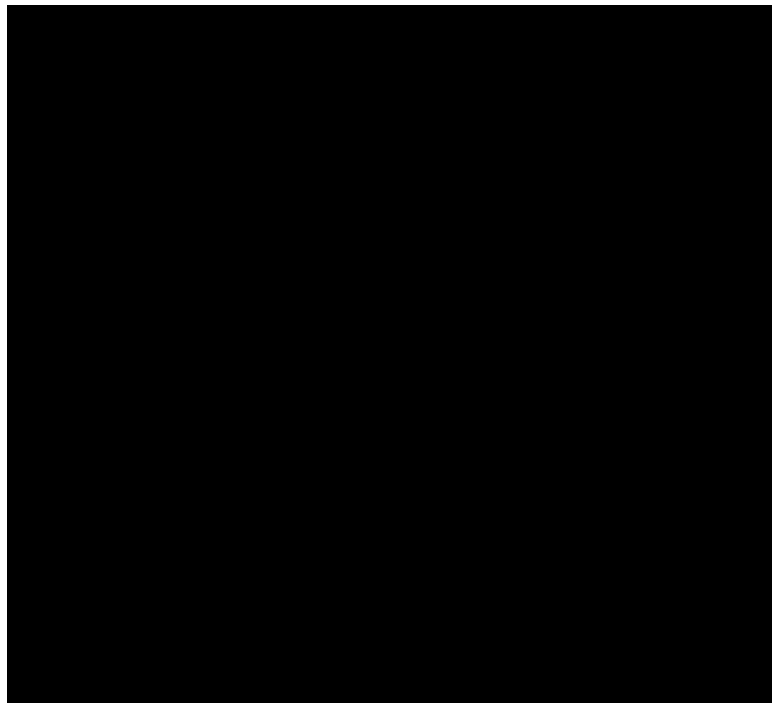
<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon*, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

MacGill is therefore a more pointed use of Catholicism in order to be critical of the view that to die in battle is a positive sacrifice, and to show that, despite the religious invocation, there is no Christian burial in this context.

There is also a degree of unintended irony in MacGill's reference to the Holy Mother. Recruitment posters within Ireland used the image of the Virgin Mary, as is shown in the image below (Figure Four):



**Figure Four**

Religious and secular imagery combine in an attempt to call people to the colours, as the Virgin Mary was used as a symbol of Catholicism in Ireland in order to boost enlistment.

Patrick MacGill shares his Catholicism and unflinching depiction of death with other European Great War writers, and both these common aspects, are somewhat at odds with each other, although they offer another way in which MacGill pulls away from the more familiar accounts of the war, and its British national context, in order to voice another perspective. MacGill's Catholicism, as at other times in Irish history, allows us to perceive a connection between him and other European soldier-writers, a tradition of war writing



outside of that espoused by many in Britain. A sense of a double identity - it being possible to be simultaneously representing Britain, due to wearing the King's uniform, and to maintain a connection with one's Irish identity through a link to one's heritage - is further extended as MacGill connects the tradition of the rosary to a wider view of Roman Catholicism, a position he explores by reference to his contact with a wounded German soldier.

In *The Great Push*, in his role as a stretcher-bearer, Patrick MacGill was patrolling in captured German trenches, searching for British casualties. He admits, through an interior monologue, that he knows little of the men against whom he is fighting: 'I cannot well pass judgement on a nation through seeing distorted lumps of clotting and mangled flesh pounded into the muddy floor of a trench, or strewn broadcast on the reverse slopes of a shell-scarred parapet'.<sup>1</sup> MacGill's language here replicates that of the passage describing the dead Irish soldier similarly buried under the trench, and therefore makes no distinction in death between British, Irish or German, a sentiment he explores in greater detail in his post-conflict novel *Fear!*

This suggestion of a shared experience between combatants is reinforced by the view that '[t]he enemy suffered as we did [...]'<sup>2</sup>, a potentially seditious observation in 1915 that continues:

After all, war is an approved licence for brotherly mutilation, its aims are sanctioned, only the means towards its end are disputed. It is a sad and sorry business from start to finish, from diplomacy that begets it to the Te Deums that rise to God in thanksgiving for victory obtained. (88)

MacGill's use of the term 'brotherly', by its incongruity in this context, invites the reader to focus upon that word: it indicates a sense of the familial, of camaraderie between individuals predicated upon shared experiences. There is a sense of irony prevailing as the reader is presented with the image of brothers mutilating each other. The idea of the Germans as

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push*, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

brothers was an almost unspeakable heresy in the war because the official position of the government was that British soldiers should kill the enemy; a view underpinned, the establishment argued, by a higher authority, God.

Notable, then, is the passage in *The Great Push* in which, upon entering an enemy dugout, MacGill describes seeing a severely wounded German officer. MacGill aids the dying man, providing him with morphine. While doing so, ‘I happened to bring out my rosary beads and he noticed them. He spoke and I guessed that he was inquiring if I was a Catholic. I nodded in assent.’<sup>1</sup> This began a process by which the German soldier, despite being in pain, indicated to MacGill for him to take an item out of the wounded man’s tunic; it was a family photograph depicting his wife and child:

I put it in his hand, and with brilliant eyes and set teeth he raised his head to look at it ... I went outside. M’Crone was coming along the trench with a bomb in his hand. “Any of them in that dug-out?” He asked “One” I replied. “Then I’ll give him this,” M’Crone shouted. His gestures were violent [...] “The one in there is dying”, I said. “Leave him alone.” (91)

In his position as a medical orderly MacGill was illustrating how he put into action the notion of humanity missing in the Te Deums offered up by the victors, earned at the expense of men such as the dying German. In this instance Roman Catholicism has a positive, personal role on the battlefield for Patrick MacGill as he counters M’Crone’s violence, and perhaps pleasure of combat, in part predicated upon his, MacGill’s, Catholic faith.

For Patrick MacGill the rosary is a symbol that permits him to express a sense of national identity and to articulate a sense of pan-national camaraderie with an enemy soldier. Any sense of fighting for British nationalist causes is undermined by the significance of the rosary. Yet he was a member of His Majesty’s armed forces. MacGill does steer clear of making overt political statements - he leaves that until 1921 and the novel *Fear!* - but in memoirs that touch upon symbols, imagery and indeed language that could be associated with

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

an Irish nationalist cause, an absence of rhetoric supporting a British position is, in and of itself, telling.

The Catholic images and associations in these works are used to undermine British Protestant ideology as much for their political significance, an affiliation that cuts across nations, as they do in religious or national terms. Through his use of pan-national Catholicism, MacGill can be seen to be questioning the motivation for the beginning of the war: to be inspired to go to war, his texts intimate, predicated in part upon the use of Christian-based rhetoric, necessitates an ideology that forgets the other side held similar beliefs. Through this position, it is suggested, there is no sense either that the role of Catholicism in MacGill's writing, or indeed in any of the texts written by the Irish soldier-writers, celebrate the notion that killing the enemy is a pleasurable act - MacGill connects, for example, through Catholicism with a wounded German officer whom he aids - or that to sacrifice oneself in battle is noble and/or worthwhile. This is the position MacGill adopts to criticise the prosecution of the war at a societal level. However, through the ironic use of religious imagery he articulates a progressively more strident and personal anti-religious stance as, overtime, he becomes increasingly exposed to the brutality of the frontline.

During the evening following the incident with the wounded German soldier, MacGill records how he was walking through the battlefield and came across a group of dead British soldiers - all of whom had been killed within close proximity of one another:

Many were spread out at full length, their legs close together, their arms extended, crucifixes fashioned from the decaying flesh wrapped in khaki. Nature, vast and terrible, stretched out on all sides; a red star-shell in the misty heavens looked like a lurid wound dripping with blood. (210)

The soldiers adopt a position in death akin to that of Christ, an image reinforced by the 'red star shell' linking heaven with the wounds of battle. In the Catholic Gospels, specifically John, mention is made of Christ being pierced by a lance while on the cross from which there

‘came out blood and water’<sup>1</sup>: MacGill thus places within an overtly religious image a further, more covert link to the crucifixion, as any notion of a redemptive connection to the message inherent in Christ’s death is quickly dismissed.

As MacGill walks across the battlefield he trips over one of the men. Any positive associations with the crucifix shape adopted by the man’s body are further negated by MacGill’s observation as to the context of the soldier’s death: ‘The corpse [was] a reminder of mad passion, of organised hatred, of victory and defeat’.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of the outcome of battle there are always those who died, killed due to ‘organised hatred’. This term references the national political and military strategy, rather than some higher cause; for MacGill this was the reality of warfare. MacGill documents the abject nature of death:

it was a man who was not; henceforth it would be that and that alone. For the thing there was not quietude of death and the privacy of the tomb, it was outcast from its kind. Buffeted by the breeze, battered by the rains it rotted in the open. Worms feasted on its entrails, slugs trailed silverly over its face, and lean rats gnawed at its flesh. The air was full of the thing, the night stank with its decay. Life revolted at that from which life was gone, the quick cast it away for it was not of them. The corpse was one with the mystery of the night, the darkness and the void. (211)

Nature, in a manner at odds with that previously depicted nostalgically by MacGill, is at work on a man who has died an unnatural death as the dead soldier is denied burial and reduced to one component of a food chain.

MacGill’s observation that the body was an outcast among its comrades connects this man back to the Munster Fusilier in *The Red Horizon*: both men have been denied the burial ceremony afforded to Siegfried Sassoon’s friend Dick Tiltwood. The deceased is outcast not only from the living but the dead, those who have been interred and so achieved some form of recognition and final resting place. A body such as this in Henri Barbusse’s *Under Fire*

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<sup>1</sup> *Jerusalem Bible*, ‘The Gospel According to Saint John’, Chapter 19, Verse 35.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push*, p. 211.

made the ground ‘unwholesome’, while men like MacGill’s Irish Fusilier are indiscriminately ‘tramped down’ into the ground.

In such imagery there becomes apparent a class difference that existed even on the battlefield: Sassoon attends the Christian burial of his officer friend while these men, all privates, are reduced to objects. Through his connection of religious imagery for both of the dead men he portrays, Patrick MacGill depicts what could be viewed by the devout to be blasphemous use of the ideology of Catholicism. This process, as will become apparent, also occurs in the war writing of James Hanley and Liam O’Flaherty, but its purpose here, it is argued, is to heighten the realism of MacGill’s imagery. In turn this causes the reader to evaluate what is being portrayed against an established norm; in this case, symbols associated with the Catholic notion of redemption.

There was no religious or civil ritual for the outcast soldier who was killed and left to rot in a field. In *The Great Push*, through the image of another dead man identifiable as a German soldier by the colour of his uniform, MacGill makes a further attack on the prosecution of the war. He begins this process by asking: ‘Who is going to benefit by the carnage, save the rats which feed now as they have never fed before?’<sup>1</sup> MacGill openly states the reality of the war is ‘[d]estruction, decay, degradation’ (136), with all three components apparent in the image of a dead German soldier MacGill views from his position in the trench. At first the description offers a degree of aesthetic consolation: ‘Yes, there He is, hanging on the barbed wire, I shall go and speak to Him ... The dawn blushed in the east and grew redder and redder like a curtain of blood – and from Souchez to Ypres the poppy fields were of the same red colour, a plain of blood.’ (137) Looking at the man he notes the beauty of the dewdrops hanging on the wire:

Out in front of my bay gleamed the Pleiades which had dropped from heaven during the night and clustered round a dark grey bulk of clothing by one of the entanglement

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push*, p. 135.

props. I knew the dark gray bulk, it was He; for days and nights He had hung there, a huddled heap; the Futility of War. (137)

The capitalised pronouns suggest that MacGill sees the dead German soldier as Christ having in this instance been crucified on the barbed wire. Nature imbues the figure with a semblance of beauty as MacGill notes that, in the early light of day: 'He was not repulsive' (137), as the man in the field had been. However, as the sun rises and the dew is burnt away:

I saw now that He was repulsive, abject, pitiful, lying there, His face close to the wires, a thousand bullets in his head [...] I endeavoured to turn His face upward, but was unable; a barb had pierced His eye and stuck there, rusting in the socket from which sight was gone. I turned and ran away from the thing [...] Was not the dawn buoyant, like the dawn of patriotism? Were not the dew-decked wires war seen from far off? Was not He in wreath of Pleiades glorious death in action? But a ray of light more, and What is He and all with Him but the monstrous futility of war ... Mac tugged at my shoulder. (137-138)

Patriotism, with attendant notions of glory, are, to MacGill, as ephemeral as the 'dew' burnt away by the sun's 'ray'. The image is of the crucified Christ pierced by the product of technological modernity. This reduces the Saviour to an object, '[a] thing', at a stage in mankind's existence against which, in MacGill's opinion, religion has nothing to offer.

What this episode illustrates is not only the empathy MacGill extended toward the enemy but the sense that being in the frontline was work, thereby again countering any idea that Patrick MacGill's war memoirs presented '[an] heroic portrayal of war'.<sup>1</sup> David Taylor further suggests that MacGill based this 'portrayal' upon maintaining a 'positive' image of serving as a soldier which included depicting 'the romance of the rifleman'.<sup>2</sup> It is argued in this thesis that MacGill does not present any such notion of 'romance' as associated with the term 'heroic', in any of his war writing. This is for two reasons: firstly, the role is but a job. MacGill's texts are devoid of any support for prevailing values connected to the British Empire, notions of chivalry, sacrifice and duty, for example, all necessary, it can be

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<sup>1</sup> David Taylor, 'From Fighting the War to Writing the War: From Glory to Guilt?', p. 297.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 298.

suggested, for the term ‘romance’ to have traction in the context advanced by Taylor.

Furthermore, the term is not applicable to Patrick MacGill’s war writing, due to the fact that the realism of MacGill’s imagery leaves no room for a romantic view of warfare.

It is recognised here that Patrick MacGill does conclude *The Red Horizon* by stating that ‘[t]here is romance, there is joy in the life of a soldier’.<sup>1</sup> However, the author’s use of the word ‘romance’ is not used in connection with warfare. The end of this memoir depicts MacGill ‘[l]azily’ falling down into a ‘straw’, tired after having marched out of the frontline:

The whole barn is a chamber of mysterious light and shade and strange rustlings. The flames of the candles dance on the walls, the stars peep through the roof [...] we lie still resting, resting [...] We take full advantage of a rest, as a rest is known to the gloriously weary. There is romance [...] (175)

Patrick MacGill’s depiction of romance is set against the realism of his memoir. The moment in the barn assumes a significance because it is outside the norms of trench life: the men are safe, warm and able to ‘rest’, all aspects that are difficult, if not impossible, while in the frontline. MacGill’s portrayal appeals to the imagination, apparent in the imagery of the ‘candles [and] the stars’, which elevate the author’s condition away above the mundanity of war.

The description of the soldier on the barbed wire is one that has been considered in Terry Phillips’ ‘The Wisdom of Experience: Patrick MacGill’s Irishness Reassessed’. There, she argues that MacGill portrays ‘[Christ] not as saviour, but as fellow-sufferer [...] Christ as a human being’.<sup>2</sup> Phillips’ position is based upon the idea that MacGill portrays soldiers and Christ as men, with each enduring similar hardships. This thesis offers a different reading for the figure of Christ in MacGill’s writing maintains its position as a divine individual. For example, in his poem ‘A Soldier’s Prayer’ (1916), the author portrays a man on sentry duty

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon*, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Terry Phillips, ‘The Wisdom of Experience: Patrick MacGill’s Irishness Reassessed’, *Sub-Versions, Transnational Readings of Modern Irish Literature*, ed. by Ciaran Ross (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), p. 48.

gazing upon a church destroyed by shell-fire in which there is a figure of Christ. The soldier then seeks Christ's intercession: 'There in the lonely war-lit night to Christ the/ Lord I call/' "Forgive the ones who work Thee harm. O Lord, forgive us all".<sup>1</sup> Here, as in all of MacGill's writing, Christ is 'the/Lord': He maintains His divine status. However, due to circumstances of war, any notion of redemption inherent in such symbolism is not merely undermined, but explicitly denied by MacGill.

'A Soldier's Prayer' portrayed an even more strident anti-war message than that delineated in his memoir as the stripping away of any meaning that religion and religious iconography may have held in pre-war life becomes apparent. In the poem's first stanza MacGill records the interior destruction of the building. The memory of a warm, inviting, functioning pre-war church is replaced by the reality wrought by war:

The altar rails are wrenched apart, with rubble  
littered o'er,  
The sacred, broken sanctuary-lamp lies smashed  
upon the floor;  
And mute upon the crucifix He looks upon it  
all –  
The great white Christ, the shrapnel-scourged,  
upon the eastern wall.<sup>2</sup>

MacGill's use of the word 'mute', repeated as it is throughout this poem, is a term that has as its dominant meaning that of losing the ability to speak. This is opposed to a Christ whose words bring hope. The notion, for a religious person, that Christ is 'mute' and therefore unable to offer words of comfort could be unsettling but, to MacGill the soldier, this sentiment reflects the reality of the conflict.

The war brings such a position to the fore: rather than being lashed by Herod's men, Christ is now 'shrapnel-scourged'. As recorded in the Gospel of Saint John it was the soldiers who crucified Christ and, once he was dead, one man 'pierced his side with a lance;

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, 'A Soldier's Prayer' in *Soldier Songs* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1917), lines 37-40, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, lines 5-12, p. 113.



and immediately there came out blood and water'.<sup>1</sup> Metaphorically, the lance has been replaced by a shell yet MacGill, as a soldier, must accept part of the responsibility for the position in which Christ is now depicted: 'Mute, mute He hangs upon His Cross/the symbol of His pain/And as men scourged Him long ago/they scourge Him once again-'.<sup>2</sup>

MacGill's use of repetition reinforces Christ's inability to affect the war in a positive manner. Indeed Christ is but another casualty of war, 'shrapnel-scourged'. The message implicit in this stanza is that, once again, soldiers inflict pain upon Him; they are the ones who 'scourge Him'. As mentioned earlier, there is within the poem a plea from the poet: "O Lord, forgive us all".<sup>3</sup> Unlike the silent Christ the poet's persona speaks to implicate all of society, 'us', in the scourging of the war.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates that Patrick MacGill in *Children of the Dead End* and his memoirs *The Red Horizon* and *The Great Push* presents a sense of continuity between his peacetime role as a navy and as a private soldier in the British army. This link of employment was suggested by Dominic Behan later in the twentieth century in the title of his song, 'McAlpine's Fusiliers'. This connection of the two roles is predicated on a sense of shared working conditions and the tasks undertaken by working class men: hard, manual labour, often performed in circumstances of extreme danger, as a navy or soldier.

Further links have begun to be explored, which will be continued throughout this thesis: namely, the notion that Patrick MacGill's war memoirs share similarities with other working class soldier-writers, irrespective of nationality. In addition, MacGill's memoirs, alongside the other writers studied here, permit one to note the beginnings of a strain of Irish working-class writing. This later manifests itself in the work of writers such as Donall Mac

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<sup>1</sup> *The Jerusalem Bible*, The Gospel of Saint John, Chapter 19, Verses 34 and 35.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, 'A Soldier's Prayer', lines 33-36, p.115.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, line 40, p. 115.

Ahmhlaigh, thereby giving the works a significance beyond being merely a sub-altern description of the conflict in which the three Irish soldier-writers served.

The two strands of MacGill's life, labourer and soldier, were further connected by a religious symbol, the rosary, and, through an exploration of the place of it and other such imagery within the author's war memoirs, it has been demonstrated that MacGill used references to his Roman Catholic religion in a manner that undermined the British nationalist account of the war, together with the motives for fighting it. For MacGill Catholicism is a prism through which he views the waste of war. Accordingly the crucifix becomes a means by which he registers the absence of meaning to death in battle. Furthermore, MacGill then established a connection between soldiers of different nationalities predicated upon a shared Roman Catholic belief.

Patrick McGill's two memoirs stand as a witness to, and memorialisation of, the experiences of working-class, Roman Catholic Irish soldiers, written contemporaneously as they were between 1915 and 1916. He wrote an unflinching account of the circumstances in which men were forced to exist - often quite literally - upon their dead comrades. The experiences he portrayed were in contradiction to the officers' texts. Although MacGill was financially motivated to write, in so doing he produced works that questioned the reasons for war. MacGill was to do so again, but not until during the inter-war era. As will be discussed in the next chapter, between 1916 and 1918 the tone of Patrick MacGill's narratives changed: he became a writer of propaganda.

## Chapter Two: ‘The psychological study of a man on the Western Front’: Patrick MacGill’s Novels *The Brown Brethren* and *Fear!*

### Introduction

As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, Patrick MacGill’s memoirs depicted the author’s ambivalent and complex attitude to the conflict as they portray a sense of dual allegiance. MacGill described himself publically, in his published text *The Amateur Army*, as simultaneously a ‘real’ Irishman and a British soldier. Yet in private he was perhaps more forthright in his opinion of his lack of support for the prevailing values that underpinned the conflict as shown by the scoring out of the printed Y.M.C.A. letterhead ‘FOR GOD FOR KING AND FOR COUNTRY’.

Further, MacGill’s two war memoirs contain a portrayal of the hard, manual labour expected from working class infantrymen, a different picture of the conflict than is portrayed in the existing canon as neither work, written while the conflict was ongoing, subscribe to prevailing ideas of patriotism, duty or sacrifice. As Peter Buitenhuis argues in his text *The Great War of Words*, the majority of war writers, both civilian and military, ‘helped to sustain the illusion of present glory and coming victory that the High Command wished to present for the government and people of Britain’.<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill’s memoirs, although written early in the war, challenged that ‘illusion’.

No person was supposed to write critically of the war as the government had enacted the Defence of the Realm Act 1914 (DORA), legislation that deemed any texts unsupportive of the conflict as seditious and for which one could be prosecuted. As Christopher Andrew notes in his *The Defence of the Realm* (2009) the powers of DORA were wide ranging, giving ‘the [British] government powers close to martial law’.<sup>2</sup> Yet Patrick MacGill did write at the

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda 1914-18 and After* (London: Batsford, 1989), p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of M.I.5* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), p. 53.

time, and in a manner that was not supportive of the war; as previously noted, his memoirs, in the opinion of Monk Gibbons, were ‘perhaps the first books to delineate the protagonists on the western front (*sic*) as they actually were’.<sup>1</sup> Indeed research for this thesis has uncovered a letter MacGill wrote to Canon Dalton in which he states that ‘I was taken to General Headquarters and brought before the adjutant General’. MacGill goes on to say that the General told him to ‘stop writing [as] It’s not in strict obedience to military law’<sup>2</sup>. The order was ignored.

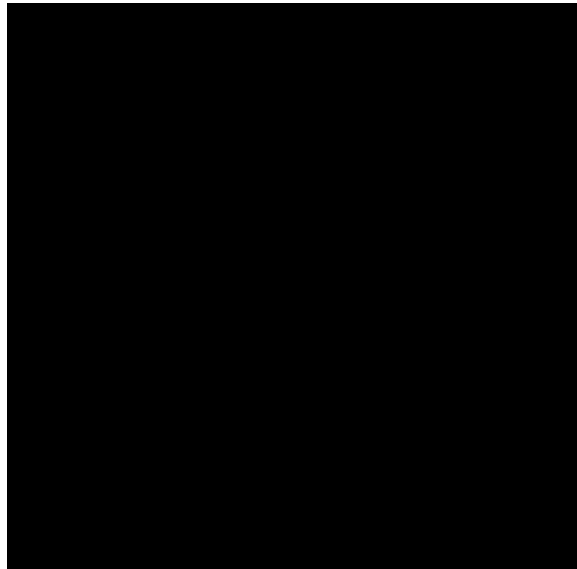
Patrick MacGill’s memoirs stopped abruptly in November 1915 due to the author receiving a bullet wound that necessitated treatment in the 4<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, France. From there, he returned to England in order to convalesce. The Irishman had served on the frontline for eight months but he was destined never to return as an infantryman. Rather he was posted to section M.I.7b, Room 419, Ministry of Intelligence, War Office, London, as the extract overleaf from the section’s official ‘Green Book’ (Figure Five) illustrates (although his name is misspelt). MacGill worked alongside men such as A.A. Milne, Sir Frank Fox and Lord Dunsay engaged, as research here reveals, in ‘literary writing’ and ‘visit[ing] troops in various quarters here and abroad collecting stuff for propaganda purposes’.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Monk Gibbon, *Inglorious Soldier*, p. 133

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, letter to Canon Dalton, 19/10/1915.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick MacGill, letters to Canon Dalton dated 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1917 and 24<sup>th</sup> December 1918 respectively.



**Figure Five.**

MacGill's role in that department was to produce 'foreign and domestic propaganda, including press releases concerning army matters'.<sup>1</sup> In addition, as will be considered in this chapter, Patrick MacGill also continued to write longer works: between 1916 and the end of the war, he published three propaganda texts for the British government, *The Brown Brethren*, *The Dough-Boys* and *The Diggers*.

Charles Masterman established Britain's war propaganda bureau, M.I.7, in Wellington House, the name of a block of flats in Buckingham Gate, London. On 5 September 1914 the British cabinet decided there needed to be a counter to the tide of propaganda being issued by the German government and appointed Masterman 'chief of Britain's war propaganda bureau'.<sup>2</sup> The posters, leaflets and pamphlets issued by the Germans were, as M. L. Sanders outlined in his 'Wellington House and British Propaganda During The First World War' an 'attempt to explain [Germany's] entry into the war and [to] discredit the motives of the allies'.<sup>3</sup> Masterman's department, working in such secrecy that 'even parliament was largely

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<sup>1</sup> [www.mi7b.wordpress.com](http://www.mi7b.wordpress.com) [Accessed 17/10/2015].

<sup>2</sup> Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words* (London: Batsford, 1987), p. xv. The bureau was placed within the War Office with a general designation of M.I.7 and sub-divided into sections 'b', 'c' and 'd'. Patrick MacGill worked in 'b' whose function was to write military articles.

<sup>3</sup> M.L. Sanders, 'Wellington House And British Propaganda During The First World War' in *The Historical Journal*, XVIII, I (1975), p. 119.

ignorant of its existence', produced work the focus of which was 'directed at foreign opinion'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as James Duane Squires noted in his *British Propaganda at Home and in the United States*, the purpose of this material was to encourage countries such as America 'to take a right view of the actions of the British government [from] the commencement of the war'.<sup>2</sup> America was not the only country to which propagandist documents, pamphlets or books were distributed: they were also sent to Italy, Spain and Portugal, among others. It can be noted that Patrick MacGill's novel *The Brown Brethren*, perfectly fitted the remit of M.I.7's work, published as it was in the United States through MacGill's New York publisher, George H. Doran Company.

Patrick MacGill's *The Brown Brethren*, as a text, brings to the fore a question: what is the difference between propaganda and fiction? It is suggested that the border between the two is a porous one with context and intention being the primary determiners as to which broad category a text may belong. As stated above Masterman's writers produced propagandistic material 'directed at foreign opinion' but in the first instance, it can be suggested, in order for there to be propaganda there must be a propagandist to write, and in most instances they work within a controlled environment.

The purpose of propaganda is to influence 'opinion' or as Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo stated in *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies* 'the concept [of propaganda] is defined as a mode of mass persuasion'.<sup>3</sup> As A.P. Foulkes stated in *Literature and Propaganda* the intention of such material is 'to demoralize the enemy or strengthen the resolve of one's own side'.<sup>4</sup> In order to successfully do this, Foulkes states, '[propaganda's]

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> James Duane Squires, *British Propaganda at Home and in the United States from 1914 to 1917* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo, 'Introduction: Thirteen Propositions About Propaganda' in *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*, ed. by Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> A.P. Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p.8.

real power lies in its capacity to conceal itself, to appear natural, to coalesce completely and indivisibly with the values and accepted power symbols of a given society'.<sup>1</sup> It is this aspect of Patrick MacGill's war writing that is relevant to *The Brown Brethren* as it is a novel, a work of fiction MacGill produced as propaganda, but he was not an independent author – such as when he published *Children of the Dead End*. MacGill was working in order to further the 'power' of the 'society' by whom he was employed, the British. The purpose of *The Brown Brethren* was not only to entertain but also as a means of 'mass persuasion', to persuade a British and American public of the efficacy of the allied cause, and to thereby encourage more men to take up arms.

Fiction is a work of imagination, with imaginary events and characters the purpose of which is to entertain, educate and inform. However, one can note the fluidity between the two terms, as mentioned above. *The Brown Brethren* is fiction but, it is suggested, there is an element of reality as MacGill had been a frontline soldier and he had been involved in a battle such as that described in the text. As David Lodge stated of fiction, in his *The Art of Fiction*, '[it is] a rhetorical art - that is to say, the novelist or short-story writer *persuades* us to share a certain view of the world for the duration of the reading experience, effecting, when successful, that rapt immersion in an imagined reality'.<sup>2</sup> As can be noted, Lodge, as did Auerbach and Castranovo in relation to propaganda, uses the term '*persuades*'. For Lodge, however, that process is only for 'the duration of the reading experience' and this, it can be suggested, is the crucial difference between fiction and propaganda. Propaganda is one-sided, it seeks to permanently alter one's attitudes and behaviour, such as detailed above in relation to *The Brown Brethren*. Fiction's purpose is rather more short-term, granted such

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. x.

texts can influence one's views, but, it is suggested, the primary function of literature is to entertain.

*The Brown Brethren* does entertain as MacGill provides the non-combatant reader with a sequence of events that distract one from everyday events by taking one to the Western Front. In addition the novel informs one, it is argued, in a particular manner, namely the descriptions of the actions of the British soldiers are propagandist in tone as the text, to re-use A.P. Foulkes' phrase, is able to 'conceal' in a 'natural' and 'invisible' manner the 'values' of British society. In short, *The Brown Brethren* portrays the brave British soldiers overcoming the German enemy such that on the final page one of the characters states: 'it's an honour to die for one's country'.<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill's novel combines propaganda and fiction because it is a text of 'mass persuasion', aimed in part at persuading American readers of the validity of Britain's position in the war, cloaked in a work of fiction, an object intended to entertain.

Many established writers, such as Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling and H.G. Wells, were employed by the government to produce propaganda and, as Peter Buitenhuis outlines, an 'Author's Manifesto' was published with the following, self-explanatory, title: 'Famous British Authors Defend England's War: Fifty-three of the Best-Known Writers of the Empire Sign a Vigorous Document Saying That Great Britain Could Not Have Refused to Join the War Without Dishonour'.<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill was not a signatory to this document and some of his propaganda neither defends nor protects the honour of 'the Empire'. There is an ambivalence to the war found in his memoirs that surfaces even in an ostensibly propagandist novel such as *The Brown Brethren*, a work that follows the experiences of a platoon of men fighting at Vimy Ridge and then on the Somme. *The Diggers* or *The Doughboys*, however,

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Brown Brethren* (New York: George H. Doran, 1917), p. 296.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, p. 19.



are both works of pure propaganda, portraying the exploits of Australian and American troops respectively.

Given that Patrick MacGill's memoirs were so detailed in their portrayal of the realism of trench warfare just why was MacGill chosen to write propaganda? Here, an unpublished document from the National Library of Ireland sheds some light upon Patrick MacGill's choice. The manuscript, entitled 'Memorandum of Interview', bears the date and location of 'DUBLIN CASTLE 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1916' and was written by an unknown hand:

I had a talk yesterday with George Russell (AE) with regard to the sort of literature with which Ireland should be fed to ensure an improvement in the recruiting atmosphere. His idea [is] that some good writers knowing something of journalism should be told off as Irish Eye-witnesses, and that once a week a letter from one of them should be circulated to all the newspapers having any considerable circulation of Ireland. The first name he mentioned was Patrick MacGill, whose books such as "The Children of the Dead End" show wonderful descriptive power. MacGill is now serving as a Private in, I believe some Rifle Regiment. Francis Ledwidge [a] poet rather than journalist [and] Stephen Gwynn [was] also mentioned as well is Canon Hannay (George Birmingham) who is going out as a Chaplain. In a long talk I had with John Dillon the other evening he also suggested that the class of literature which would best help recruiting was graphic correspondence from the front.<sup>1</sup>

The image of Ireland being 'fed' a type of literature in order to improve the recruitment 'atmosphere' encapsulates the concealed purpose of propaganda: literary control by the government for its own ends, a process an unknown official suggested Patrick MacGill's prose could help facilitate. Ironically, on the date printed on the document MacGill, having seen and then experienced the reality of war, was recovering from a wound sustained while serving '[at] the front'.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Memorandum of Interview', National Library of Ireland, Ms.31,700 (2). George Russell (1867-1935), a writer, poet, painter and politician who played a pivotal role in Ireland's cultural and political life. Francis Ledwidge (1887-1917), poet, served in the ranks of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers until his death in the Battle of Ypres. Stephen Gwynn (1864-1950), author and politician, enlisted in the 16<sup>th</sup> Irish Division as a private in 1915, serving in France, before being commissioned and assisting the British government with recruitment. George Birmingham (1865-1950) served as a Protestant Chaplain in France between 1915 and 1918. John Dillon (1851-1927) was an Irish nationalist who supported John Redmond M.P. and his stance of Irish participation in the conflict in order to gain Home Rule post-Armistice, but Dillon abstained from wartime recruitment activity. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com). [Accessed 13 August 2015].

In this chapter the profile of a writer who steps between purposes as both a soldier and an author - one who at times writes 'graphic' propaganda, superficially a contradiction in terms - will be considered through an examination of *The Brown Brethren*, a text in which MacGill borrows techniques from adventure fiction, offering a sometimes uneasy blend of realism and heightened action. Elements of this text will be considered alongside MacGill's inter-war war novel *Fear!*, before the significance of the title to the latter narrative is explored in detail. On one level this text was clearly written to sell, with the title's punctuation betraying a degree of sensationalism. Yet militating against this, and ultimately winning out, to determine the novel's dominant stylistic mode, is Patrick MacGill's desire to show the psychological effects of war upon individuals. *Fear!* is a text that raises questions about a person's reaction to the conditions of battle, a position that will be examined, albeit in a totally different context, in relation to James Hanley's novella *The German Prisoner* in the next chapter.

### **M.I.7b And Propaganda Writing**

Of the three texts MacGill wrote while in M.I.7b *The Diggers* and *The Dough-Boys* will be considered only briefly because they are works of pure propaganda. The tone of both connects with the tenor of the government's intent; that is for texts to glorify the actions of entente troops, thereby helping to 'sustain the illusion of present glory and coming victory'. The reality of the conflict was, as Adrian Gregory noted in his *The Last Great War*, rather less optimistic:

In the course of 1917 the strains of war were creating a widespread sense of gloom [...] News of the bloodbath at Passchendaele, despite positive representations in the press, reached the public. The brief exaltation over the breakthrough at Cambrai turned to an even more bitter disillusionment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 213.

This extract is taken from Gregory's chapter, 'Struggling to Victory 1917-1918', which encapsulates the extent to which propaganda was still required late in the war. Although its aim was not to increase British recruitment, conscription was already in place, texts such as *The Diggers*, *The Dough-Boys*, and indeed *The Brown Brethren* were published in the United States of America thus they functioned to recruit émigrés, and others who might be encouraged to enlist. Such works were therefore intended, it can be suggested, to assuage the 'bitter disillusionment' at home and improve 'the recruiting atmosphere' abroad.

The style of *The Diggers* and *The Dough-Boys* is encapsulated in the words of the Australian Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. W.M. Hughes who, in a 'Foreword' to *The Diggers*, wrote of MacGill's work: 'yours will be a story to make the pulses of all Australians leap in their veins with exultation'.<sup>1</sup> Hughes' words are somewhat undermined, however, when he admits in the final paragraph: 'Although I have not seen the manuscript of *The Diggers*, with such a theme it is impossible that the author of *The Children of the Dead End* and *The Great Push* can fail'.<sup>2</sup> MacGill's realist texts referred to by Hughes are, stylistically speaking, markedly different to the pure adventure and 'propaganda' which can be illustrated by a short extract from *The Diggers*: 'Bullets hissed past their ears, flying shrapnel splinters wounded them but with imperious dash and sublime indifference to death they swept on the gun crew and destroyed it'.<sup>3</sup> The propagandistic nature of this passage is akin to literature written during the war for young people. As Rosie Kennedy wrote in her *The Children's War: Britain, 1914-1918* the predominant mode of writing for children was of adventure, in which 'British soldiers [were] always gallant, brave, strong and resilient [but] the fighting described in the books predictably bore little or no resemblance to the real thing'.<sup>4</sup> Patrick MacGill was not writing for children although he employed a narrative style that was adventurous in tone

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<sup>1</sup> Rt. Hon. W.M. Hughes in 'Foreword' to Patrick MacGill, *The Diggers* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1919), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Rosie Kennedy, *The Children's War: Britain, 1914-1918* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 72.

such that *The Diggers* is, in parts, similar to ‘juvenile fiction’. The invincibility of MacGill’s Australian soldiers, as bullets ‘hissed past their ears’ while shrapnel only ‘wounded’- enabling the men to destroy the enemy – presented a sanitised term that conveys the notion of death, without any of the detail apparent in *The Red Horizon* or *The Great Push*.

This thesis does not in any way wish to undermine Patrick MacGill’s actions during the war: he served in the trenches, took part in, and was wounded at, the Battle of Loos, an encounter in which British casualties approached 50,500, while German losses were close to 20,000.<sup>1</sup> What is revealed across his work, however, is the complex interaction Irish men had with the First World War. The conflict provided MacGill with both opportunity and material, first as a soldier in the trenches, then as a propagandist and finally post-Armistice, for his creative writing. MacGill was not a signatory to the ‘Author’s Manifesto’, rather he was a private soldier, Irish and working class. Yet he was taken to the heart of the wartime British Empire, the War Office. MacGill’s view of his position is perhaps exemplified by his attitude to *The Doughboys*. It turns out that the text was superfluous to the war effort because, as MacGill wrote in a letter: ‘[*The Doughboys*] served no purpose [for] the war had stopped just as it was completed and it was a case of either throwing it in the waste basket or using it in any way I thought fit for my own purpose’<sup>2</sup>. The final clause is telling, since it hints at MacGill’s financial and business acumen. It also provides a clue as to MacGill’s flexible attitude to the war because, it can be suggested, he viewed such texts as an opportunity to earn money and, with the ‘Foreword’ written by Australian Prime Minister Hughes, to expand his profile as a writer.

What this thesis has uncovered is the fact that Patrick MacGill received payment for what he wrote: it was not simply a case of producing texts as a soldier, released through

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Hart, *The Great War 1914-1918* (London: Profile Books, 2014), p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, letter to Canon Dalton, 27/02/1919.

government channels, and then receiving only a private's wage.<sup>1</sup> As has been discussed in the previous chapter, MacGill's writing separated him, to some extent, from his comrades, both navvies and soldiers, because he occupied a space outside of their intellectual understanding: earning money from writing; a cerebral rather than physical undertaking.

As an author MacGill also appears to be one step removed from M.I.7b. The three texts mentioned above were all written by Patrick MacGill the soldier, but published as though he was a civilian. Visually, there is no difference between the physical objects comprising *Children of the Dead End*, *The Brown Brethren* and *Fear!* All were published by Herbert Jenkins using identical paper and font. Each contains advertisements detailing the author's earlier works. Thus even during wartime, professionally, MacGill appears to have trod two distinct paths, soldier and writer. This is significant since he is the only writer, Irishman or officer, who occupied such roles during wartime. MacGill worked at the heart of an establishment that was acting against his own countrymen, a position distasteful to many in Ireland, and yet he was making money writing propaganda that contains moments that are clearly not supportive of Britain's wartime effort.<sup>2</sup>

*The Brown Brethren* is an ambiguous text oscillating in style between adventure fiction and realism. It will be considered alongside MacGill's interwar novel *Fear!* with which it shares similarities. Despite the former's ideological aims, both texts challenged precepts upon which the conflict was predicated. *The Brown Brethren* is written in the third person, with an omniscient narrator describing events and reporting upon the comments of the characters. As will emerge in this chapter, although the novel is a work of propaganda

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<sup>1</sup> An infantry private such as Patrick MacGill was paid 1s. 0d. a day. By comparison a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, for example Siegfried Sassoon, received 7s. 6d. [http://www.1914-1918.net/pay\\_1914.html](http://www.1914-1918.net/pay_1914.html) [Accessed 26/04/2017].

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished correspondence by Patrick MacGill, are held in the Berg Collection, New York Public Library and the Canon Dalton archive, in addition to which there are legal contracts filed with Random House Publishing. There are many references made by MacGill, some written from the trenches, to royalties he was awaiting or received for his war writing. Given the penury into which the author was born, it is perhaps not surprising that he was anxious to receive any money that was owed to him.

there are moments that are critical of the continued prosecution of the conflict. Yet it is not possible to ascribe such a stance directly to Patrick MacGill as his authorial voice does not emerge directly from the text.

*Fear!* is a novel written in the first person with the narrator a British man, Arthur Ryder. As Patrick MacGill stated in a letter, he viewed the purpose of this interwar novel to be ‘the Psychological study of the temperament of a nervous man on the Western battle front. [It] will deal with the stark realism of war, not with that jingo-speaking, flag-waving, doing-your-bit pattern, but with the more real human heart crucifying aspects of the contest’.<sup>1</sup> MacGill’s aim lies in his portrayal of ‘the stark realism of war’, which extends from descriptions of the physical ‘horrors’ to the psychological ‘terror’<sup>2</sup> as *Fear!* not least through its title, issues a challenge to MacGill’s readership by tackling the anxiety, and war-induced trauma, experienced by the narrator.

MacGill’s title, like that of Chevallier’s,<sup>3</sup> who uses the same word but without punctuation, addresses an issue from which developed the term ‘trauma’ - but was a condition not fully understood in post-war Britain. As Joanne Bourke states in her ‘Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the end of Trauma: The Sufferings of ‘Shell-Shocked’ Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-1939’, since trauma is an invisible wound, meaning that ‘men were ignored, victimised and the pensions authority tried to reduce payments by attempting to prove the men were malingerers’.<sup>4</sup> Patrick MacGill’s *Fear!*, and as will become apparent later in the thesis, Liam O’Flaherty’s *Return of the Brute* and *The Black Soul*, all portray soldiers with

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, letters to Canon Dalton dated 24 December 1918 and 27 February 1919.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Fear!* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1921), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Gabriel Chevalier, *Fear*, trans. by Malcom Imrie (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Joanna Burke, ‘Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the end of Trauma: The Sufferings of ‘Shell-Shocked’: Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-1939’ in *Journal of Contemporary History*, (Vol. 35 No. 1, Special Issue Jan. 2000), p. 62.

varying degrees of war-induced trauma. In so doing depict all of these in an extended manner, a subject barely considered in works of the canon.

### **Patrick MacGill's Narrators**

The first person narrator of *Fear!*, Arthur Ryder, is an Englishman employed as a barber in the fictional village of 'Little Fobythe' (11) until his conscription into the British army and thus is not a direct representation of the author such as one finds in *The Red Horizon* or *The Great Push*. Ryder is, however, similar to MacGill in that both were working class.

Although Ryder is a business owner, having inherited it from his father, he is still working class because, as discussed in the Introduction, there were gradations within that section of society. Thus, while being self-employed, as the character Ryder describes, 'all the amount of England's earth in possession of most of the villagers was that which stood in the flowerpots on the window sills' (34). Author and character share membership of the same class because each 'hav[e] no means of production of their own' other than 'their [own] labour power in order to live'. Ryder may own the business but the village, and all its property, is owned by a member of England's aristocracy.

As discussed in the Introduction, the working-class was not an amorphous mass. Robert Roberts outlined, in his *The Classic Slum*, how a working-class community was stratified from 'shopkeeper' down to 'unskilled workers' - the lowest of which were 'Irish Roman Catholic immigrants' who could actually be described further as being poor.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that Ryder is self-employed and a business owner, he does not own the infrastructure that permits him to be a barber: the building is not his own, it belongs to a member of the upper-class. To paraphrase the words of Marx and Engels, Ryder only possesses his own

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum*, pp. 17-18.

‘labour power’ having ‘no means of production’ as the shop is one for which he pays rent to the owner, one who can be viewed in this context as a capitalist.<sup>1</sup>

Why an Irishman would chose such a character as Ryder through whom to narrate a war novel may initially appear puzzling. Yet an answer can perhaps be found in an unpublished and previously unseen letter, written by the author’s wife, Margaret MacGill.

On 14 May 1920 Margaret wrote to Herbert Jenkins, Patrick MacGill’s publisher, concerning

*Fear!*:

Patrick if he is to bring out a book at all this autumn must choose between two evils – a war book, or a book on Ireland which will not be likely to be any more popular with the public seeing that the country is (proportionally) making as bad an impression on the English mind as did Germany during the war.<sup>2</sup>

Margaret MacGill’s letter clearly suggests that, due to the inter-war political position in Ireland, a book relating to that country’s part in the Great War may not have been favourably received. Accordingly then one could imagine that the choice of an Irishman as the main protagonist may also have created a similarly ‘[bad] impression on the English mind’.

However, a further idea as to why MacGill did use an Englishman can be advanced. *Fear!* portrays what, to some, may be viewed as unpatriotic aspects of the war. Ryder is presented as unwilling to enlist; indeed he states ‘I evaded service’ (40). The significance of the term ‘evaded’ will be explored as the chapter progresses but, at the outset it bears noting that Ryder ‘[had] no enthusiasm for any ulterior motive such as patriotism, [no] belief in the justice of the cause [or] faith in the final good of the conflict’ (28). If the main protagonist had been Irish there may have been the possibility that the novel would have been dismissed due to anti-Irish sentiment, as just another Irishman unwilling to fight for the Empire.

However, in his use of an Englishman, it is argued, Patrick MacGill was able to address issues wider than the representation of combat as the novel’s themes could not be simply

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret MacGill, letter to Herbert Jenkins dated 14 May 1920, held by Random House in their unpublished archive of Patrick MacGill. The collection does not have a reference.



dismissed due to the 'bad impression' English people may have had of the Irish. Ireland, however, is not completely absent from the text, as MacGill presents a connection to that country that helped to accentuate the message the author portrays through Ryder.

In both *The Brown Brethren* and *Fear!* Patrick MacGill depicts Irish characters each with details that remind one of the author. In *The Brown Brethren* a Private Fitzgerald is described as having been 'a rover and wandered through many parts of the world as sailor, tramp and outcast'.<sup>1</sup> The narrator describes Fitzgerald as having '[come] from the West of Ireland [...] he was an omnivorous reader and carried a number of books about with him in his haversack. Montaigne was a great favourite of his'.<sup>2</sup> MacGill similarly had dark hair, was born in the West of Ireland and spent time as a navvy '[on] the tramp'. In *The Red Horizon*, the author describes how Michel Montaigne was a writer who 'in a dug-out is a true friend and a fine companion'.<sup>3</sup>

In *Fear!* one of the working class private soldiers is Myles MacMahon who is Irish. Unlike *Children of the Dead End*, where Dermot Flynn is to an extent representative of the author, *Fear!* is, like *The Brown Brethren*, less confessional. There are certainly similarities between the author and the character MacMahon who is depicted as speaking with 'an Irish brogue [...] He was a well-built man nearing his thirties, broad-shouldered, blue-eyed and clean shaven [and] a soldier who had been fighting since the outbreak of war [and] who had been wounded'.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the reader is informed that 'MacMahon had been a War Office clerk' (53), as had MacGill, who goes on to describe the Irishman as 'a middle-sized man with the shoulders and frame of a wrestler, [with] the face of a poet' (101). Thus while *The Brown Brethren* and *Fear!* are both novels, each populated predominantly by English and Scottish soldiers there are still Irish characters in whom the author has imbued

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Brown Brethren*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon*, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Fear!*, pp.46-47.

characteristics and qualities of himself. In so doing MacGill is able, in both texts, as in his memoirs, to present the idea of continuity between peacetime experiences and wartime work as an infantryman for an Irish, Catholic, working class soldier.

### **Ireland As Home**

Patrick MacGill's referencing of Ireland vis Myles MacMahon emerges in these texts, in part, through the author's quoting of Irish ballads. In *The Brown Brethren* Fitzgerald is depicted singing three verses of 'The Famine Song', the first of which is:

Oh, the praties [potatoes] they are small  
Over here.  
Oh, the praties they are small  
Over here.  
The praties they are small  
And we ate them skins and all,  
Aye, and long afore the Fall  
Over here.<sup>1</sup>

The song is a lament thought to have been written during the 1840s, at the height of the food shortage in Ireland. Thus 'the fall', and the opening line of the second verse, 'No help in hour of need/Over here' (28), appears to contain a dual meaning: on the one hand it is a statement of fact as 'No help' was provided to many of the starving poor in Ireland. Surely this line is a criticism of many within England, who failed to assist those in Ireland. As such it is a dissonant voice within the text, more consistent with that of the memoirs, and is the first time that MacGill alludes in his fictional war writing to the exploitation and suffering endured by the Irish working class at the hands of the colonial power.

The overt message in 'The Famine Song' also raises a more oblique allusion, when Private Fitzgerald, at a later point in *The Brown Brethren* sings three verses from the 'Nell Flaherty's Drake'.<sup>2</sup> Superficially this is an Irish street ballad but it is also believed to be a crypto-rebel song: the drake allegedly represents Robert Emmett who, in 1803, led a failed

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Brown Brethren*, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 134.

rebellion against the English. Figures in the song take on a significance to Irish history with the grandmother representing Kathleen Ni Houlihan and individuals such as ‘Nell’ being future participants in an Irish rebellion.<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to know with complete certainty that Patrick MacGill was aware of all the dimensions of this history, he may simply have included the lyrics innocently, but the presence of Irish revolutionary songs still might have appeared to an Irish reader as striking an odd note in a work about serving in the British army. By quoting lyrics from both ‘The Famine Song’ and ‘Nell Flaherty’s Drake’ in *The Brown Brethren* Patrick MacGill might simply have been implying that if one enlists in the British army as an Irishman one can nonetheless maintain one’s own national identity. However, he may also have been drawing attention to the hardships endured for centuries by the Roman Catholic working class in Ireland.

Patrick McGill continued with such allusions in his interwar war novel *Fear!* Private Myles MacMahon delivers two lines from a poem entitled ‘Fontenoy’. MacMahon states: “- King Louis turns his rein/’Not yet my liege,’ Saxe interposed. ‘The Irish troops remain!’”.<sup>2</sup> Although using only two lines, ‘Fontenoy’ is a poem that describes how, in 1745, at the Battle of Fontenoy, Irish troops came to the aid of the French by defeating an English army. The author of the poem, Thomas Osborne Davis, died in 1845 and, as Roy Foster has stated in his text *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, could be seen as ‘the purest Irish patriot of his own or any age’. Davis was a member of The Young Irelanders, a group of journalists and publishers who espoused views predicated upon the notion of ‘[Ireland’s] spiritual rebirth through nationhood’. To this end, Davis ‘stressed the romance of violent resistance to English oppression’.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Sean-nos song’, [www.celticwomanforum.com/sean-nos-song](http://www.celticwomanforum.com/sean-nos-song) [Accessed 17/10/2015].

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Fear!*, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1989), pp. 311-312.

There is one further significant aspect to be discussed in relation to MacGill's use of 'Fontenoy': the Irish émigré experience. Davis's poem portrays Irishmen leaving home to fight. While this dimension may be lost upon a casual English reader, this poem speaks to this specific form of Irish immigration as well as to a notion of camaraderie rooted in nationality - one that brings to the fore the fighting skills, and tenacity, of Irish soldiers. For MacGill, it is argued, the participation of working class, Roman Catholic Irishmen in the First World War must be viewed through the prism of history as being yet one more conflict in which his countrymen take part; a sentiment that, as will become apparent in the final chapter, is central to Liam O'Flaherty's novel *The Black Soul*. Combat has been but a job for many Irishmen throughout history, an occupation often devoid of support for any prevailing doctrines although sometimes assisting religious causes such as 'Catholic Belgium'.

MacGill's choice to quote in his war writing from works such as 'Fontenoy' may simply have been coincidence. However, it is argued, the range of Irish nationalist works cited, from the 'Wearing of the Green' in *The Red Horizon* to those in *The Brown Brethren* and *Fear!*, as discussed above, is such that Patrick MacGill's ambivalent attitude to the conflict - one of dual allegiance - is evident insofar as all of the texts allude to the treatment Ireland received at the hands of the English. MacGill, it is argued, shows the reader colonial imperialism from the other side.

In *Fear!* Patrick MacGill depicts his condemnation of what he views as the imperialist policy of the British army, in both overt and covert vocabulary and imagery. The latter emerges, it is argued, in the author's depiction of the private soldiers living on the British frontline - akin to those subjugated by Britain's imperialist adventures of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Ryder moves into the trenches for the first time he describes how:

here all sound, all motion save our own, had seemingly ceased; we had entered a city of the dead. In the mass of shade I could make out the misty outlines of projecting

traverses, bulges in the parapets, deep holes that opened into the paradoss, white faces that peered from the deeper gloom, masks pinned to a wall of ebony (117).

There is a sense of duality in MacGill's phrase 'a city of the dead'; on the one hand the area is quiet, as though populated by the dead, the 'mist' and 'gloom' giving the soldiers a ghostly presence. On the other hand, a second more chilling image emerges if one views the soldiers as being already dead because they are in the frontline: it is only the matter of when they are actually killed.

There is a sense of alienation in MacGill's imagery as though the men are in an outpost on the extremities of civilization. Elements of this passage connect with similar descriptions in Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*: the city of Brussels Marlow visits when joining his company is as though 'a whited sepulchre' and the building in which he received his instructions was 'as still as a house in a city of the dead'.<sup>1</sup> The house was, for Marlow, the final vestige of the empire's mechanism, but it was alienated from the metropolis. So too, it is argued, is the imagery of MacGill: the trench in which Ryder is posted is 'the first British line' (F/176). Therefore, it is the final connection in a long line that stretched from the battlefield to the heart of Britain's war effort: the War Office in London.

The private soldiers observed by Ryder as he entered the trenches are reminiscent of a description in *Heart of Darkness* of men directly subjugated by empire. Marlow depicts the occupants of a canoe which was being rowed out to his ship: 'It was paddled by black fellows [...] they had faces like grotesque masks'.<sup>2</sup> A short time later he describes the workers at a mine as follows: 'Black shapes [...] clinging to the earth, half coming out [...] in all attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair' (65). MacGill, it is argued, highlights the inequities being suffered by lowest ranks in the British army by depicting them in terms suggestive of individuals who suffered at the hands of imperialism. It is the soldiers' white faces imaged

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* in *Youth/Heart of Darkness/The End of the Tether*, ed. by John Lyon (London: Penguin Books, 1995), pp.55 and 57.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

against a background which is described specifically by the term ‘ebony’: appearing to be trapped, ‘looking out’ as they are held in that place, ‘pinned’ almost as though in a Gothic dungeon. This position is replete with irony as the men who, as will become presently apparent, through military procedure, were forced to subdue others are themselves here depicted by MacGill as the subjugated.

In this episode Patrick MacGill portrays what Gail Ching-Liang Low has described in her text *White Skins/Black Masks* as ‘the colonial uncanny [...] The uncanny in this sense is that which reflects back to the colonial identity another image of itself based on the inversion of its normal structure: a home that turns out not to be a home and a self that turns out to be some other being.’<sup>1</sup> The soldiers, although alive, are depicted by MacGill as being the population of ‘a city of the dead’; as such, they are ‘some other being’. Their homes are ‘deep holes’, which provide protection - but can also be viewed that such ‘turn[s] out not to be a home’. In this imagery MacGill presents an ‘inversion’ of what would be considered ‘normal’. Yet the men so depicted are protecting the Empire. They are at the frontier keeping those at home safe but out of sight, hidden from view. MacGill’s men, in the case of Fitzgerald and MacMahon, Irish, Catholic working-class soldiers are simultaneously subjugated by, but also protecting, the Empire.

### **Patrick MacGill’s Portrayal Of Killing As Work**

Irish soldiers, in both *The Brown Brethren* and *Fear!* - men such as Privates Fitzgerald or MacMahon - are portrayed by Patrick MacGill, just as in *Children of the Dead End* or in his memoirs, as being skilful at fighting. In the novels under discussion in this chapter, combat is again viewed as a facet of the men’s lives, but now such activities assume a greater significance for the individuals concerned. MacGill takes the reader into the arena of hand to

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<sup>1</sup> Gail Ching-Liang Low, *White Skins/Black Masks: Representation and colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 114.

hand combat - initially through the language of adventure fiction in *The Brown Brethren* - culminating in a psychologically charged episode in *Fear!*

*The Brown Brethren* contains a chapter entitled 'The Sniper' in which MacGill depicts how the British trenches have been under fire from a German marksman. In order to find the enemy soldier, Private Benners 'fixed his sword [bayonet] on his rifle and clambered over the parapet into No Man's Land'.<sup>1</sup> The British and German soldiers meet and fight between the trenches: 'Bowdy was the strongest man in the regiment [...] a wrestler second to none' (186). In language that appears comical, the German sniper, 'his lips twisted into a snarl that almost reached his heavy brows [said] "You haf no chance with me [I] am wrestler on English music halls"' (187). During the fight both men lose their rifles, and they strike each other repeatedly: 'The blood from a gashed eyebrow was blinding [Benners] Clutching and straining, he resisted gamely [until] His opponent went down, falling like a log, and lay still' (192-193).

There are glimmers of Patrick MacGill's narrator Dermot Flynn from *Children of the Dead End* in this chapter, in particular the reference to the 'wrestler' and the 'gashed eyebrow'. This episode highlights the propagandistic side of the author's work: the soldier's job is to fight and he does so valiantly and against a difficult foe. The British soldier wins and is awarded a decoration for his efforts, 'a clasp to his D.C.M.' (195). This depiction of the violence of war bears little resemblance to the actualities of combat designed as it is here to promote the martial qualities of the British soldier as against the alleged weakness of the German combatant.

Later in the same novel, however, Patrick MacGill includes a description of combat that is in complete contrast with that described above:

The German first line drew nearer; the English could almost see the expressions of the men's faces; felt that the soul of the attackers was not in their work. The attacking

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Brown Brethren*, p. 182.

lines withered like waves on a beach. One man who came in front flung down his rifle, raced towards the crater with his hands in the air and jumped in on top of [Private] Bill Hurd's bayonet, a ludicrous fixture.

"Pull it out!" he yelled in agony, speaking good English. "Pull it out, for Gott's sake."

But there was no time to spare at that moment; the English were fighting to save their own skins. The German rolled down to the bottom of the crater with the bayonet on which he had sat stuck in his body. (153-154).

This is propagandistic writing but tinged with a degree of the graphic, as the author of the memorandum discussed earlier had suggested. MacGill's description in this passage reflects the sentiments apparent in the opening paragraph of the army's manual of *Bayonet Training* 1918:

To attack with the bayonet effectively requires **Good Direction, Strength and Quickness**, during a state of wild excitement and probably physical exhaustion. The limit of the range of a bayonet is about 5 feet (measured from the opponent's eyes), but more often the killing is at close quarters, at a range of 2 feet or less, when troops are struggling *corps a corps* in trenches or darkness.<sup>1</sup>

In the extract from *The Brown Brethren* there is 'wild excitement', and MacGill's portrayal of Private Hurd's experience is that of 'close quarter[s]' killing: Hurd is 'fighting to save [his] own skin'. This image is stronger than any described in the text to that point. Although there is a hint of the pace and language of adventure fiction in this passage, there is also a connection to the realism of MacGill's memoirs apparent both in the overall image the author conveys, but also in the phrase referring to the impaled German, who has become 'a ludicrous fixture'. This term is rather incongruous with the overall tenor of the passage, adding, as it does, a depiction of the reality of combat that, while not being overly gruesome, could be viewed as unsettling to the reader.

As mentioned earlier the idea of 'graphic' propaganda does appear to be something of a contradiction. After all, the purpose of such a text at this time, it can be suggested, was to

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<sup>1</sup> *Bayonet Training* 1918 (1916 Reprinted with Amendments) Issued by the General Staff, p.1. Bold emphasis is in the original.



encourage recruitment among those not subject to British conscription. *The Brown Brethren* was published in 1917 and to have written a text too sanitised risked, it is argued, ridicule. By then Patrick MacGill's memoirs, *The Red Horizon* and *The Great Push*, had already provided a realistic insight into life in the trenches of France. Thus while *The Brown Brethren* was to an extent 'graphic', and able to retain its propagandist tone, the novel certainly was not, as will become apparent, visceral in its portrayal of violence - especially when compared to elements in MacGill's later novel *Fear!*

At this point, prior to considering Patrick MacGill's depiction of Ryder's use of the bayonet in *Fear!*, it is appropriate to briefly discuss how such a weapon was represented in canonical writing about the First World War such as in Wilfred Owen's 'Arms and the Boy' and then Siegfried Sassoon's 'Remorse':

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade  
How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood;  
Blue with all malice, like a madman's flash;  
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.<sup>1</sup>

Remembering how he saw those Germans run,  
Screaming for mercy among the stumps of trees:  
Green-faced, they dodged and darted: there was one  
Livid with terror, clutching at his knees...  
Our chaps were sticking them like pigs...Oh Hell!  
He thought-'there's things in war one dare not tell  
Poor father sitting safe at home, who reads  
Of dying heroes and their deathless deeds'.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly the poems by Owen and Sassoon do not depict the bayonet and its role in an immediate and lethal way, rather, each officer portrays others using the weapon. It is '[o]ur chaps' who are doing '[the] sticking' as Sassoon presents the scene through an unnamed narrator, 'he', while for Owen it is 'the boy'. Owen and Sassoon may have witnessed such

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfred Owen, 'Arms and the Boy' in *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. by Jon Stallworthy (London: Chatto and Windus, 2002), lines 1-4, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, 'Remorse' in *Collected Poems: 1908-1956* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), lines 7-14, p. 91.

scenes but, in all likelihood, they would not have taken part in such acts or indeed ordinarily have used bayonets - other than perhaps in an emergency, when any item may have been used to protect one's life. There is an implied notion of class in these poems because the army did not issue such weapons to officers, only to men in the ranks.

In *Fear!* Patrick MacGill takes the reader, in a manner he had not done previously, into the combat environment and the psychological repercussions suffered by Arthur Ryder. At its core *Fear!* returns to a realist depiction of the work undertaken by soldiers in the ranks. It also registers the emotional effects of the context of such work. Where it indulges in somewhat overblown or seemingly fantastical descriptions, this is often in straining to get at experiences of sensory deprivation or psychological disturbance. One example comes in a chapter entitled 'The Raid', which begins with Private Ryder donning his gas-mask, at night, entering No Man's Land and advancing toward the German trenches:

Viewing [comrades] through the eyepiece of a respirator, they appeared to me as phantoms of a disordered dream [...] Under my feet when I looked down I could see nooks and crannies filled with greenish lights that moved hither and thither across the field as if invisible fingers were tracing, in maleficent patterns, diabolical pictures on the ground [...] poison-gas [...] Out of touch with my fellow-creatures, I was alone in a world of phantoms (133-134).

This opening description exemplifies aspects associated with the experience of working class soldiers explored throughout the thesis. MacGill presents both the idea of being within a group, '[m]y platoon was detailed for [the] raid' (131) but yet, on occasions such as this, being 'alone' when in No Man's Land. Combat can be just such a dichotomy: in a group but simultaneously alone, fighting to keep oneself alive - which is what MacGill captures in this episode.

One can consider the term No Man's Land to take on an added significance as it becomes populated, as here and in the works of James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty, by something other than humans: in MacGill's extract the soldiers are transformed into 'creatures' or, more potently, 'phantoms', a term that alludes to the notion of living men who

are somehow already dead. These soldiers populated the description discussed earlier when the narrator Ryder describes the frontlines being ‘a city of the dead’. The image of the soldiers on the raid resonates even further with Low’s notion of the ‘colonial uncanny’. As the men advance, as members of Britain’s army, they attempt to take ground on behalf of the Empire, but in so doing, each combatant becomes ‘a self that turns out to be some other being’.<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Conrad uses the word ‘phantom’ repeatedly in *Heart of Darkness* describing how, on one occasion, as Marlow travelled up the river:

We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet [...] We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a mad house.<sup>2</sup>

Patrick MacGill’s and Joseph Conrad’s texts share similarities of tone and imagery in their portrayal of environments outside of society, whereby men are ‘alone’ or ‘cut off’ and as such take on a form without material substance. Conrad’s use of the term ‘prehistoric earth’ to describe Marlow’s surroundings resonates, as will become apparent in the fifth chapter of this thesis, with Liam O’Flaherty’s *Return of the Brute* which itself will be linked back to Patrick MacGill’s *Fear!* In so doing there will be highlighted further the interconnection of soldiers being subjugated and used to further Britain’s colonial aspirations. In the process combatants are transformed into something other - as MacGill described above, not men but ‘phantoms’.

Patrick MacGill’s imagery in the extract above is similar to that used by Wilfred Owen in the second stanza of ‘DULCE ET DECORUM EST’:

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys – An ecstasy of fumbling,  
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;  
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,  
And floun’ring like a man in fire or lime ...

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<sup>1</sup> Gail Ching-Liang Low, *White Skins/Black Masks*, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, pp. 57-58.

Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,  
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,  
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.<sup>1</sup>

Although the point of view is different, as Owen's narrator is an observer rather than MacGill's active participant, as will become apparent, there are similarities of imagery: both men use the word 'dream' to suggest an unreal quality to the events that are unfolding in their work.

Patrick MacGill further increases Ryder's sense of isolation, and claustrophobia, by reducing the focus of the reader's attention to the sensation being exerted within the narrator's body:

The blanket of fog soft, but heavy, seemed to have been pulled down over my head, choking me. The elastic band round my forehead grew tighter; the veins of my temples throbbed, and the blood pounded through my head as if trying to shatter the bonds which confined it. (133)

MacGill's use of rhythm, half-rhyme, alliteration and consonance presents imagery similar to that of Owen: the poem's narrator watches helplessly as a man is 'drowning', while in *Fear!* Ryder seems to be suffocating. Both men use the word 'choking', for Owen, it is the penultimate act before death by 'drowning', but MacGill's use is to convey a sense of constriction as the description focuses upon the head of Ryder. Here the author's concentration is physical, to be replaced by a psychological 'choking', the catalyst for what occurs to Ryder moments later.

Upon entering the enemy's trench-system, Ryder enters into combat with an enemy soldier:

I was seized with a strange desire to rush into the party with the bayonet, and hack and kill. A wild madness took possession of me and, blindly tearing away from my position, I rushed on the crowd in the bay. A figure, big and ungainly, stepped out to meet me – for what purpose I could not fathom, until I heard the clank of steel against

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfred Owen, 'DULCE ET DECORUM EST', lines 9-16, p. 117.

my bayonet, and felt a sharp blow on the barrel of the weapon, almost driving it from my hand.

“You’re wanting a fight, are you?” I roared, dropping my rifle. Reaching across the opponent’s weapon, I clutched the throat of the man and shook his big, solid body. The German dropped his weapon as my fingers tightened their hold on the soft neck. I was filled with a mad delight as I saw the man’s arms waving comically, the legs bending under him, his body sinking down, and his heavy mass wriggling grotesquely as it tried to free itself. He fell and I released him to see, as it were, through a reddish mist, the thing that sprawled at my feet, moving its legs as if attempting to rise [...] This man was now rising to his feet, but, filled with a burning feeling of malignancy, trembling with a wild and wicked joy, I lunged the steel forward, and caught the man on the face, shoving the bayonet through his gas-mask and through his head. (139)

Patrick MacGill’s description of Ryder’s emotions in this extract uses the word ‘wild’ on two occasions, a term that, as has been seen earlier, is used in the *Bayonet Training* manual wherein the men are expected to be in ‘a state of wild excitement’. As uncomfortable as this may seem, Ryder is acting as his training instilled in him, as expressed earlier in *Fear!*: ‘I learned how to kill men with the bayonet, to parry, to point and stab, to shove the steel hilt deep into the opponent, to place my feet on the fallen man, and draw the bayonet out’. (69)

There is a sense of elation portrayed in both Owen’s poem and MacGill’s novel. In ‘DULCE ET DECORUM EST’ the phrase ‘An ecstasy of fumbling’ conveys a sense of irony as the narrator feels a sense of relief at having fitted the respirator ‘just in time’ and thereby saving his own life. In *Fear!* the ‘wild and wicked joy’ at killing another person is a similar form of ‘ecstasy’, for as in both works the feeling is one predicated upon survival. In a manner both are akin to - but due to context simultaneously far in excess of, as Patrick MacGill noted in *Children of the Dead End* - the social Darwinistic idea that ‘[o]nly by fighting will the fittest survive’.

Further, the first paragraph of this extract above depicts an uncontrolled soldier as Ryder is ‘seized’ by the desire to ‘hack and kill’. MacGill’s use of hard sounding vocabulary that reinforces the idea of weaponry, ‘clank [...] steel [...] barrel’, is juxtaposed against the imagery of Ryder clutching the German soldier’s ‘soft neck’. The man is reduced

to an object, 'the thing' wriggling at Ryder's feet. The sensational elements of this passage, the clichéd 'red mist' being bathetically 'reddish' nevertheless indicates a sense of fury within the ordinarily restrained Ryder, a man who previously described himself as '[a] weak, shrinking character'.<sup>1</sup> This does not entirely dispel the disturbing effect created by the abject 'soft neck' and the body as 'mass' sinking into the earth.

As has been seen the German 'sinking' and 'wriggling' together with his 'soft neck'; are graphic and unsettling; an instance of the abject as described by Julia Kristeva in her text *Powers of Horror*, encountered as an otherness that infects any 'soft' flesh, living or dead.<sup>2</sup> In *Fear!* the reader is exposed to the process of the soldier being killed. The German is simultaneously alike and unlike the onlooker, both to Ryder and the reader, as a man is transformed into an object, 'the thing', thereby breaking down to the viewer the border between life and death. In MacGill's image of the soft neck, it is argued, there is already in the text a suggestion of decomposition: at the moment of death the German's flesh seems to be melting. Soldiers in the trenches were surrounded by decomposing bodies; for example, the Irish Fusilier discussed in the previous chapter, and as such the environment was quite literally infected - 'unwholesome' to use Gabriel Chevallier's term - a process that Patrick MacGill portrays as starting the moment the soldier is bayoneted. This presents to the reader the moment a living human becomes 'the thing', a dead object.

By contrast, the officer-writers do not portray such moments in any of their texts. Of course they do depict men dying; for example, Siegfried Sassoon described in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* a man next to him who was shot: 'A blotchey mark showed where the bullet hit him just above the eyes [...] the sudden extinction of Lance-Corporal Kendle'.<sup>3</sup> This incident, however, is reported in muted, restrained language: the entry wound is described

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1930), p. 90.

only as ‘blotchey’, the reader is spared any further detail. Moreover, the deceased soldier retains his identity as he is still ‘Lance-Corporal Kendle’ and not, as in *Fear!*, ‘the thing’. This is one aspect that differentiates the three Irish working class soldier-writers from the British officers: men such as Patrick MacGill, together with James Hanley and Liam O’Flaherty, include a sense of physicality in their descriptions of life in the trenches, a facet they extend to the portrayal of death.

MacGill’s extract above portrays a pleasure in killing, an aspect of war writing that, in a different context, will be considered further in the following chapter in relation to James Hanley’s *The German Prisoner*. This notion of ‘joy’ at killing is typically absent in the officer-soldier writing, but does appear in Gabriel Chevallier’s *Fear*:

Our assault wave has swarmed into the trench screaming. The *poilus* are like wild beasts in a cage. Chassignole shouts:

“There’s one, over there! Let’s give him a lesson!”

Another soldier grabs at my arm, pulls me along and, pointing at a corpse, tells me proudly:

‘Look that one was *mine*!’

It is an instinctive reaction, joyful savagery born of extreme stress. Fear has made us cruel. We need to kill to comfort ourselves and take revenge.<sup>1</sup>

Both MacGill and Chevallier use the word ‘joy’ in their passages to describe a sense of pleasure the soldiers felt at the moment of killing. Joanne Bourke has considered this phenomenon in her *An Intimate History of Killing*, where she noted that ‘[c]ombatants frequently dared to admit to orgasmic joy in unrestrained slaughter’.<sup>2</sup> This idea is also discussed by Dave Grossman in his *On Killing* in which he suggested the link between killing and sexual ‘joy’ is ‘obvious and not so blatantly offensive’ because of the idea of survival of

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Chevallier, *Fear*, trans. by Malcom Imrie (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2011), p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing* (London: Granta Books, 2000), p. 371.

the strongest accompanied by a sense of ‘power’.<sup>1</sup> In the context of the MacGill and Chevallier, it is argued, as working class men, of the lowest military rank, they have no direction over their destiny: they are effectively powerless until the moment of attack. The ‘joy’ is that of immediate action and survival, at least in part.

As mentioned above, the imagery of pleasure attributed to the act of killing during an assault by largely working class soldiers is in contrast to the more restrained language and tone of officer-writers such as Siegfried Sassoon who, in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, depicts his single-handed attack on a German trench:

I was a little out of breath as I trotted up the slope. Just before I arrived at the top I slowed up and threw my two bombs. Then I rushed at the bank, vaguely expecting some sort of scuffle with my imagined enemy [...] I slung a few more bombs, but they fell short of the clumsy field-grey figures, some of whom half turned to fire their rifles over the left shoulder as they ran across the open toward the wood, while a crowd of jostling helmets vanished along the trench. Idiotically elated, I stood there with my finger in my right ear and emitted a series of “view-holloas” (a gesture which ought to win the approval of people who still regard war as a form of outdoor sport).<sup>2</sup>

Crucially, Sassoon’s interaction with this enemy is at a distance, and no one is killed. They remain, to some extent, ‘imagined’, even in this encounter; ‘field-grey’, a ‘crowd of helmets’. The elation here is the pleasure of being an opponent in a game rather than succumbing to the release of a violent impulse. The tone is also satirical: Sassoon’s use of the term ‘trot’, often connected with horse-riding, together with the phrase ‘view-holloas’, shouted during a hunt when a fox is sighted, underlines what kind of ‘hunt’ this is: one quixotically distanced from the quarry.

Siegfried Sassoon was undoubtedly a brave man - he received the Military Cross - but his portrayal of fighting is subdued, with his sense of elation predicated upon the thrill of the chase rather than the act of killing. What is significant about the working class writers is their proximity to death, the reality of hand-to-hand contact and MacGill’s account of this,

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Grossman, *On Killing* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1996), pp. 134-136. Grossman served as an officer in the U.S. Special Forces.

<sup>2</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1930), pp. 91-92.



while being somewhat sensationalist, nonetheless captures psychological elements of the moment and its disturbing blend of motivations and instincts that the officers do not relate or indeed experience.

All three Irish soldier-writers, as will become apparent, depict the killing of men in hand-to-hand fighting. Yet what is particularly significant about the passage from *Fear!* is that the reader is made aware of the consequences to Ryder, a man whom combat momentarily transforms from a 'weak, shrinking character' to a person who, 'with a wild wicked joy', bayoneted a man in the face. One might read in this passage a vestige of MacGill's admiration for the skill of fighting, as is discussed in the first chapter, but this contest is not simply a wrestling or boxing match, as described in *Children of the Dead End*. Here, the sober vocabulary of realist characterisation is inflected with the language of adventure fiction, which increases a sense of excitement for the reader while simultaneously becoming unstable and slightly strained in the portrayal of death.

### **Pan-National Camaraderie And Trauma**

Patrick MacGill not only portrays the physical process and outcome of fighting, but in *Fear!* he depicts the psychological effect of the use of the bayonet, as well as the suffering visited on a combatant such as Arthur Ryder through a dream/nightmare sequence. Although this sequence seems to grow out of the horror and sensory confusion of the scene itself, MacGill develops it and deliberately opens up space in the narrative for a reflection upon an aspect of the conflict which, in the excitement of the action, a reaction within Ryder to killing and death has not allowed.

Ryder is in the trenches at one moment, talking to Myles MacMahon, when the narrator is asked the time to which he replies: 'A quarter to two' (F/292). Immediately, however, MacGill describes how a match is struck with the time instantly being 'ten minutes to [two]' (293). There is thus a slippage in time in the narrative into which an unknown figure

enters, a man '[whose] garb reminded [Ryder] of a monk's, a cowl fitted over his ears, a long gown was tied round the waist with a tassled girdle' (293). In this dream sequence Private Ryder is led by the monk over the 'blasted area of No Man's Land' in which the dead 'sprouted from the ground [...] huddles of flesh and cloth, worms and putrefaction' (294). As Ryder looks down upon the scene, the dead laying 'head to head, foot to foot', start to rise:

British soldiers in khaki, French in blue, Germans in field grey [...]  
"Who are they?" I asked my guide.  
"Brothers," was his answer.  
"Germans and French and English?" I queried. "They are enemies."  
"Death knows no nationality," said my guide. "In death all are brothers."  
"All brothers, Ryder," said a headless form rising in front of me and so near to my face that I drew back a pace. The voice was that of Crabtree.  
"All brothers," said a second form taking shape beside Crabtree, and there stood Sergeant Haddock. "All brothers, Ryder, all brothers" (294-295).

In this short passage MacGill repeats the word 'brothers' on six occasions, all in addition to the implied terms referring to the monk, a religious brother, guiding Ryder. We see here another instance of pan-national camaraderie as now it is in death that the soldiers of both sides 'have [their] freedom' (295). This idea of friendship between working class men regardless of nationality is explored in various different and instructive ways across this thesis. As discussed in the previous chapter, in *The Great Push*, religion was the link between Patrick MacGill and the injured German soldier, while here it is the idea of death. *Fear!* was published in 1921, approximately two years after the original, temporary, Cenotaph was erected in Whitehall as a site for memorialising those who died fighting on behalf of Britain. MacGill's text, it is argued, is presenting to the reader the idea that the German deceased should be viewed as equals for 'In death all are brothers', a potentially contentious idea to many in Britain - especially so close to the cessation of hostilities.

Private Ryder is brought face to face with the consequence of his bayonetting of the German soldier as the image of No Man's Land changes: 'I looked on a forest bulking darkly

against the night, an ebony black against the night', with a hut inside of which are portrayed the German soldier's wife and six children:

"Did you see them?" asked my guide, putting his lips close to my ear. "Six dead, and they did nobody any harm! Died from hunger, Hah!" he shrieked. "From starvation!" "Who are you?" I groaned, endeavouring to remove my wrist. "See!" was the answer of the apparition, pointing to a gaping hole in his cheek. "Fear compelled you to do this, Private Ryder, for you had not the courage to stand for opinions of your own". Then I realised. My guide was the German whom I had bayoneted (297).

MacGill brings Ryder literally face to face with the consequence of his actions, both the impact on those relatives at home, but also to the men who must kill in their role as a soldier. It is argued that this nightmare highlights, at the beginning of *Fear!*, Ryder's war-induced trauma. As such, it challenges David Taylor's suggestion that any notion of guilt apparent in the novel is predicated upon the author's 'knowledge that his actions had indirectly brought suffering to the innocent widows and children of those he had killed'.<sup>1</sup> There is no available evidence to show that Patrick MacGill killed anyone. Yet what the author does highlight, unlike any of the other writers considered in this thesis, is the social consequence of one soldier's death in battle. All of the Irish soldier-writers examined here portray killing in their texts, but as will become apparent in the following chapters, each context is different. In the case of Arthur Ryder, the guilt he feels about his killing of the German soldier leads to an extended portrayal of the character's psychological illness. It is for this reason that Patrick MacGill introduces a sense of Ryder's remorse and not, it can be suggested, due to the author's own actions.

In the passage detailed above Patrick MacGill uses one word that is of particular importance to this discussion: fear. MacGill's use of this term, together with added punctuation, can be viewed as introducing a degree of sensationalism into the novel. Yet it

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<sup>1</sup> David Taylor, 'From Fighting the War to Writing the War: From Glory to Guilt?', p. 306.

could also be seen to be a statement made out of emotion, akin to that of Chevallier who, in the 'Preface' to his text, wrote of the title:

[*Fear*] was intended as a challenge [...] In all "war books" I had read, fear was indeed sometimes mentioned, but it was other people's fear. The authors themselves were always phlegmatic characters who were too busy jotting down their impressions that they calmly greeted incoming shells with a happy smile (xi).

Chevallier's comments could equally apply to Patrick McGill's novel. The emotion depicted in *Fear!* is that of Ryder, and Ryder only. Yet where MacGill's text goes further than Chevallier's is that the Irishman portrays the consequence of Ryder's fear. Chevallier does indeed depict a soldier who is scared, 'a fellow who is afraid, with an insurmountable fear, a cringing fear, that is crushing him'. Moments later, the narrator states: 'I believe that if I had sufficient willpower to go out and go through a bombardment, it would free me from my obsession' (211). Chevallier's narrator is in a bunker during an intense and extended artillery barrage - but he stays put, he copes.

To understand the relevance of Patrick MacGill's choice of the word *Fear!* to title his novel necessitates a discussion of terms integrally connected: trauma, cowardice and desertion, the latter two being offences for which men were executed during the conflict. As Cathryn Corns and John Hughes-Wilson argue in their *Blindfold and Alone* 'only eighteen men, sixteen on the Western Front, were shot for [cowardice], compared with 266 for desertion'.<sup>1</sup> To understand the difference between these terms one must, as did Corns and Hughes-Wilson, turn to the *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into "Shell-Shock"* (1922). There one is informed:

Fear is an emotion common to all and evidence was given of very brave men who frankly acknowledged to it. It is obvious then that fear alone does not constitute cowardice [...] If the individual exercises his self-control in facing the danger he is not guilty of cowardice, if, however, being capable of doing so, he will not face the situation, he is a coward. It is here that difficulty arises in cases of war neurosis for it becomes necessary to decide whether the individual has or has not crossed that

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<sup>1</sup> Cathryn Corns and John Hughes-Wilson, *Blindfold and Alone: British Military Executions in the Great War* (London: Cassell, 2005), p. 176.

indefinite line which divides normal emotional reaction from neurosis with impairment of volitional control.<sup>1</sup>

Cowardice can be viewed to be, in light of the above, the unwillingness to ‘face the situation’ while desertion requires ‘a long absence, or being at a distance behind the lines or found in civilian clothing’.<sup>2</sup> In other words - with regard to cowardice - one has simply evaded one’s immediate duty. What is significant about the extract from the above cited *Report* is the idea that it is not inappropriate to feel a sense of fear while in combat, as Chevallier’s text portrays, but it is what one does in response to those feelings that is important.

To momentarily return to MacGill’s letter, detailed earlier in the chapter, where he stated that *Fear!* would convey the ‘stark realism of war’. One aspect of that ‘realism’ is the ‘[p]sychological’ toll combat brought upon combatants. As Michael Roper notes in his ‘Between Manliness and Masculinity: The “War Generation” and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914-1950’: ‘Among veterans, the borderline between fear and breakdown was recognized to be narrow, and all too easily crossed’.<sup>3</sup> In Chevallier’s text that ‘borderline’ was not ‘crossed’, but this was not the case in *Fear!* What is significant about Patrick MacGill’s portrayal of Ryder is the manner in which the soldier’s actions are more than simply being in a state of ‘fear’. In the penultimate chapter, Ryder has taken cover during a battle in a ruined church:

I am seated [on the floor], my book on my knee, the ruined altar opposite with a figure of Christ with one arm gone, nailed on the crucifix. As I look at Him I cannot help thinking that He would receive me if I went to Him. Of Him I am not afraid. He is merciful. He is love [...] The figure looks down at me with a glance of sympathy as if He understands (301-302).

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the War Officer Committee of Enquiry into “Shell-Shock”* (Uckfield: Naval and Military Press and London: Imperial War Museum, 2013), p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Cathryn Corns and John Hughes-Wilson, *Blindfold and Alone: British Military Executions in the Great War*, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Roper, ‘Between Manliness and Masculinity: The “War Generation” and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914-1950’ in *Journal of British Studies* Vol.44, No.2 (April 2005), p. 351.

What is significant about this extract is how, as discussed in the first Chapter in relation to MacGill's poem 'A Soldier's Prayer', Christ maintains his divine status: 'He would receive me if I went to Him'. Unlike in the poem, in *Fear!*, the figure is not 'mute'; rather, 'He understands' the plight of Ryder who is 'without rifle or equipment [...] I ran away' (302-303). As considered earlier, this constitutes desertion.

Just as Christ was nailed to the cross then, those men killed in battle in Ryder's nightmare had been 'nailed to the rolls of honour, crucified!' (297) Patrick MacGill's use of such imagery not only undermines the notion of a religious underpinning of the war but also calls into question attitudes back home. The combatants were sent to war with the prevailing values of chivalry, patriotism, duty and sacrifice often being espoused. In death such sentiments appeared on memorials, or 'rolls of honour'. In Magheragall Parish Church, County Antrim, Ireland, for example, the following is on the top of the memorial: 'To The Glory of God And In Grateful Memory of the Men Connected To This Church, Who Nobly Fell In The Great War'. Having listed the names of the thirteen men of Magheragall who died in that conflict, the tablet concludes thus: 'Tranquil they Lie, their Knightly Valour Proved Their memory Hallowed In The Land They loved'.<sup>1</sup> MacGill's sentiment in *Fear!*, it is argued, challenges such notions of 'nobility' and 'Knightly Valour' as he advances the idea that the ideals used to send men to war, and which resulted in their deaths, were the same by which they were memorialised; 'nailed to the rolls of honour, crucified'. Patrick MacGill's position, it is argued, is that these men's deaths were metaphysically pointless, without any attendant notion of redemption as represented by the crucifix. If such was not the case then surely the German dead, their country defeated, could not be so memorialised by their country? After all, as Ryder narrates: 'All are brothers in death'. Patrick MacGill's text

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<sup>1</sup> 'Magheragall War Memorial', <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Antrim/Magheragall.html> [Accessed 07/04/2017].

reinforces this idea of waste in one final act: Private Ryder leaves the church and is killed in battle, his death ultimately achieves nothing.

*Fear!* was not Patrick MacGill's final war text. In 1923 his play *Suspense* was performed at the Duke of York theatre in London. It appeared shortly after R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* was staged and shares with it a common location and time: *Suspense* depicts in three acts events in a frontline trench 'one week in March, 1918, [ending] on the morning of March 22<sup>nd</sup> when the Germans break through'<sup>1</sup>. The play's title refers to the tension created within a group of soldiers as it becomes apparent that the enemy is mining their position with explosives, underneath their trench. The detonation occurs shortly after the platoon has left the trenches, just as the German final offensive of the war begins. The play is populated by a platoon of soldiers and lead by an officer and a sergeant. Yet none of the characters are developed and the sense of suspense is unconvincing. Moments after the mine has exploded under the men who have relieved the play's soldiers one man, Lomax, exclaims just before he is killed: 'This ain't war; this is murder'. The sergeant of the platoon responds 'Murder! War is always murder!' (64) The play is relatively thin, an example of MacGill perhaps recognising a financial opportunity, and building on the success of *Journey's End*. However his attitude to the conflict speaks loud and clear in Lomax's words.

## Conclusion

Patrick MacGill, it is argued, should not be remembered for his final piece of war writing, the play *Suspense*, but rather the little known novel *Fear!*, together with his largely overlooked memoirs, which stand as a testament to soldiers who fought in the British army. Yet it was written to portray the experiences of combat from the perspective of the Irish Roman Catholic working class. Even as a writer of propaganda for the British government, Patrick MacGill laced his texts with imagery and sentiment that enabled readers to recognise that one's

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Suspense: A Play in Three Acts* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1923), p. 4.

identity need not be subsumed by the outlook of the establishment. This position was strengthened in his inter war novel *Fear!* in which, free from the constraints of the censor, MacGill outlined how, in his view, war was not heroic or glorious - not shot through with patriotism or sacrificial death - but rather a waste of men and materiel and a source of psychological illness for many. Further, Patrick MacGill's *Fear!* portrayed how working class soldiers in general, and Irishmen in particular, were being exploited by the colonial power that was Britain.

In the text considered in the next chapter, James Hanley's *The German Prisoner*, an Irish soldier, together with his British colleague, torture and murder an enemy combatant, Otto Reiburg, the man referred to in the novella's title. Exploitation takes on a different perspective in this work, as the sadistic tendencies of two men are visited upon a man who has surrendered himself to them. Hanley's text is unique in the context of this thesis for no other work considered here, written by either an Irishman or officer, portrays such an extreme level of violence; an act carried out not for the furtherance of a military objective, but rather to satisfy two men's personal desires.



### **Chapter Three: Mud and savagery in war: James Hanley's 'The Alien Skull' and *The German Prisoner***

#### **Introduction**

Patrick MacGill's war writing, as discussed in the previous two chapters was, in some of his works, if not in others, critical of the conflict, speaking against the tide of Entente opinion that vilified the German enemy in order to suggest the exploitation of a pan-European working-class, and to hint at the colonial underpinnings of the British position. What he did not do in those works, and still less in his works of propaganda, was to suggest that the violence of the war, however unpleasant, departed from the conventions and codes by which war is undertaken. The First World War was regulated by a set of rules that ostensibly controlled soldiers' conduct, as will be analysed in this chapter. The violence portrayed by Patrick MacGill, as has been demonstrated, took place within the context of a military operation and was perpetrated against armed combatants, be that in a set piece battle, such as in *The Great Push* or a trench raid, as in *Fear!* In James Hanley's *The German Prisoner*, however, the context of violence is very different; enacted, it will be argued, for personal, even sexual gratification and presented by Hanley as a re-working, indeed a perversion, of Christ's crucifixion.

James Hanley's war writing, in which each text is written for very different reasons, sits obliquely next to the work of Patrick MacGill, Liam O'Flaherty and all of the officer-writers considered in this thesis. Hanley's 1931 novella, *The German Prisoner*, is a text in which two British soldiers, one Irish, Private Peter O'Garra, and the other English, Private Elston, torture and kill an enemy soldier, Otto Reiburg, during an advance into No Man's Land. It is a story significant not in the manner of Patrick MacGill or Liam O'Flaherty, in showing the everyday experience of a private soldier - and particularly the Irish combatants - thereby offering new and subtly politicised insights into the organisation and aims of the British army. *The German Prisoner* offers rich detail in terms of the common soldier's

experience. Yet there is a much more uncomfortable exploration of a gratuitous privatized violence that arises in the context of war, an aggression Hanley links in disturbing ways to the condition of an abject underclass in Britain and Ireland - rather than the articulate socialist or aspirational workers of his other writing. Even eighty-six years after its release, it can be suggested, *The German Prisoner* retains the ability to shock in its portrayal of sadomasochistic murder, an act of brutality not replicated in any of the other texts examined in this thesis or, indeed, in the wider body of writing that emerged from the First World War.

### **James Hanley's Early Years**

As highlighted in the Introduction, one particular aspect of James Hanley's life that remains mysterious is his birth, specifically the precise date and location. In the opening chapter of Hanley's autobiography *Broken Water* (1937), the author depicts a family picnic in Dublin, providing the reader with an impression that Ireland was James Hanley's home. However, Chris Gostick, in his 'James Hanley's Life', posits the notion that this event was in fact 'carefully crafted to suggest an Irish background'<sup>1</sup> stating that Hanley was actually born in Liverpool, England. Irrespective of Hanley's creativity, or otherwise, with regard to this aspect of his life what is not in doubt is that he spent his formative years, with his Irish parents, in Liverpool. James Hanley's family may have been in exile, émigrés in search of work, a situation that, as will be discussed in the following chapter, is reflected in his novel *Our Time is Gone* to illuminating ends. Nonetheless Hanley maintained an identification with Ireland such that it informed his war writing.

James Hanley, like Patrick MacGill and Liam O'Flaherty, was working-class, a social background that, as Christopher Hilliard noted in his *To Exercise our Talents*, was not traditionally associated with literary culture, since 'social advantages [...] usually preceded a

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Gostick, 'James Hanley's Life' in James Hanley, *Boy* (London: Oneworld, 2007), p. 181.

successful writing career in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century'.<sup>1</sup> However, as Anthony Burgess observed in his 'Introduction' to Hanley's novel *Boy*, '[l]ike Ernest Hemingway, James Hanley made fiction out of the action he had himself experienced'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, although Hanley did not enjoy 'social advantages' he was able to create from what he knew.

Hanley lived within an urban Irish Roman Catholic émigré working-class milieu, living at, as he entered on his Canadian army enlistment form, '28 Orthello Street, Liverpool'. This was a house in the Kirkdale district that Chris Gostick described as:

a tough, rough-and-ready working-class community, in which life was hard and frugal [...] Work was largely manual and casual, with men often fighting for jobs on the docks or ships, and steady wages uncertain. [...] Edward and Bridget Hanley never strayed from the small handful of Kirkdale Streets clustered around the Canada Dock, with the River Mersey just beyond.<sup>3</sup>

This description is highly pertinent to Hanley's novel, *Our Time is Gone*, notably in his description of Gelton, a fictional Liverpool. Yet for this chapter it serves to highlight the author's 'tough, rough [and] hard' pre-war life, all of which is reflected in the experience and formation of the Irish and British soldiers in *The German Prisoner*, albeit in ways which are, as will be seen, somewhat problematic.

James Hanley served in both peacetime and wartime on ships of the merchant navy, following which he was an infantryman in the trenches of France, suffering wounds from poison gas that necessitated his return to England. Upon being demobilised from the army Hanley moved back to Liverpool from where, in 1929, he wrote to the publisher Edward Garnett, describing himself as 'a labouring man. At night I write ... Am out all day on the railway – and trying to get my writing done'.<sup>4</sup> Hanley's sentiment in this extract clearly

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratization of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Burgess, 'Introduction' in James Hanley, *Boy* (London: One world Classis, 2010), p. ii.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Gostick, 'James Hanley's Life', p. 182.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents*, p. 127.

identifies him as a labourer, both on the railway and as a writer. It is significant that both Patrick MacGill and James Hanley have been shown to be involved in manual labour in addition to writing. Having to support himself as a railwayman will have limited the time for creativity but, conversely, to write authentically of the working-class, Hanley was aided by living within the community about which he wrote. As with MacGill, however, the labour of writing was one that seemed in tension to some degree with the manual work that gave him his identity as a working-class man.

Up to this point, in the thesis, little consideration has been given to the circumstances surrounding the publication of the war writing by any of the working class Irish soldier-writers. Yet in relation to *The German Prisoner* that process is germane to the discussion that follows due to the novella's content. Patrick MacGill was already an established writer upon his enlistment in 1914 and all of his war writing was released through his publisher, Herbert Jenkins. As Christopher Hilliard outlines: '[c]ertain publishing houses were especially open to [working class] authors – Jonathan Cape for instance [and] Herbert Jenkins', the former publishing Liam O'Flaherty's *The Black Soul*.<sup>1</sup> Herbert Jenkins and Jonathan Cape were connected, at different times, to The Bodley Head, the publisher of James Hanley's *Our Time is Gone*. Thus the method by which the public had access to the central works considered in this thesis, with the exception of *The German Prisoner*, were through recognised publishing houses whose primary focus was the texts of working class authors.

*The German Prisoner* was the second of Hanley's works to be released, the first, *Drift*, having been published by Eric Partridge's Scholartis Press. Partridge, who himself had fought in the war, set up his company in order to publish new writers because he believed that '[l]anguage is not, like everything else, in the hands of the haughty and educated: it is the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 149.

people's property, and sometimes all they have'.<sup>1</sup> Why Partridge did not publish *The German Prisoner* cannot be ascertained although its difference and distance from *Drift* is marked. Indeed it might well have seemed unpalatable to Partridge, both in itself and as a product and representation of the 'people'. Partridge did, however, introduce the author to the man who took it on, Charles Lahr. Together with his wife Esther, Lahr had, as John Fordham noted in his *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class*, 'impeccable revolutionary credentials [They were] key figures in the London Branch of the Communist party'.<sup>2</sup> However, Charles Lahr was more than a man who, like Eric Partridge and James Hanley, held left-wing views. As Huw Osborne has outlined in his 'Counter-Space in Charles Lahr's Progressive Bookshop' the proprietor was a connector for, and his bookshop a nodal point in, a literary network, one composed of writers who included 'D.H. Lawrence, William Roberts, Liam O'Flaherty, T.F. Powys, H.E. Bates, Nina Hamnett [and] James Hanley'.<sup>3</sup> What is significant is not only that Hanley and O'Flaherty, as well as the Vorticist painter William Roberts – all important to Hanley's novella, as will become apparent – moved within the same milieu but also that they existed on the political periphery of society. The importance to the thesis of this aspect of Hanley's life lies in the freedom Hanley, via publication, enjoyed in the subject matter of *The German Prisoner*, unconstrained by British obscenity laws. This curious work may also have appealed to a publisher conversant with emerging modernist work, rather than concerned principally with social extension.

Many of the writers who came into contact with Lahr, James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty included, wrote of 'working-class, revolutionary or anti-establishment themes'.<sup>4</sup> Hanley's social circle at this time was 'an alternative literary community and shadow

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Partridge, *Eric Partridge in His Own Words* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1980), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class*, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> Huw Osborne, 'Counter-Space in Charles Lahr's Progressive Bookshop' in *The Rise of the Modernist Bookshop* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 133-134.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

economy [...] a communal and even anti-commercial [space] set against the mouthpieces and authorities of official literature'.<sup>1</sup> As such, Hanley was not artistically constrained by outside influences: he could, and did, write as he wished which, in the context of his war writing, produced a text unlike anything else considered in this thesis.

*The German Prisoner* was printed in a run limited to five hundred and fifty, all numbered, each signed by the author and inscribed 'for sale to Private Subscribers'.<sup>2</sup> One can argue that such a process of sale is counter-intuitive to the Communist ideals of men such as Lahr and Hanley. Yet there are two reasons, highly relevant to this discussion, why this process was followed: this method of publication was arguably 'an anti-marketing strategy that approached print culture with a great deal of irony'.<sup>3</sup> This idea nonetheless emerges from the commodification of the object, a necessary evil if publication was to be achieved: scarcity, plus the novella's content, created demand which generated money and so enabled the author to continue to write.

The second point is a more general one, raised by Christopher Hilliard, but it specifically relates to the content of *The German Prisoner*:

Obscenity laws were diligently policed in the interwar Britain: the banning of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* was the most notorious case [...] publishers were extremely cautious about obscenity and libel. Privately issuing a limited edition to subscribers was not legally publication, and thus circumvented the Obscene Publications Act 1857, under which [Hall] had been prosecuted.<sup>4</sup>

As to whether Hanley deliberately chose to privately publish *The German Prisoner*, or it was forced upon him by the work's content, cannot be known. Either way the underground nature of such a text garnered a degree of notoriety for Hanley. Indeed Huw Osborne described the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, pp. 143-144.

<sup>2</sup> James Hanley, *The German Prisoner* (Muswell Hill: Private Printing, 1931), flyleaf.

<sup>3</sup> Huw Osborne, 'Counter-Space in Charles Lahr's Progressive Bookshop', p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents*, p. 145.

work as ‘a destabilising print object’ due to its portrayal of sexual violence and murder, which surely would have prevented its mainstream publication.<sup>1</sup>

Although the novella was not officially censored, it did come to the attention of the judiciary, as reported in *The Daily Mail* on 3 October 1935:

Professor Julian Huxley, the biologist and Dr. Maude Royden, the preacher and social worker gave evidence [...] It was alleged that the firm published and sold indecent books, and the summonses called on them to show why the books should not be destroyed [...] the police had taken possession of 99 copies of a book called “Boy”; 12 copies of “The German Prisoner”.<sup>2</sup>

Hanley’s novel *Boy* is remarkably similar in content to *The German Prisoner*, as both contain imagery of sexual violence and murder perpetrated by older men upon younger victims. In the case of *Boy* it regards Arthur Fearon, a thirteen year old cabin boy on a merchant ship. Yet *The German Prisoner* is unique in putting this into the context of war, where, ironically, the perversion of violence was arguably a more significant taboo. There were norms in place to govern the conduct of soldiers during the First World War, specifically The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, which covered such activities as the treatment of prisoners of war.

James Hanley’s novella, it is argued, generates questions less pertinent to works by Patrick MacGill or Liam O’Flaherty due to the former’s violent imagery. These are questions that may appear to fall outside the socio-cultural frame of this thesis but, this discussion will argue, are also linked to Hanley’s origins as a private soldier relatively immune by background to any patriotic or political ideology that keeps such questions in abeyance. His writing begs such questions as: What do civilians expect from soldiers in war? Provided they kill the enemy, and that is a soldier’s job, should one care how that is accomplished? These are not all the points raised, however. George Kassimeris’s, in his ‘The Barbarisation of

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<sup>1</sup> Huw Osborne, ‘Counter-Space in Charles Lahr’s *Progressive Bookshop*’, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 3 October 1935, p. 19.

Warfare: A User's Manual', advances two questions in relation to war that are particularly apposite to Hanley's novella: firstly, '[c]an warfare be anything other than barbaric?'<sup>1</sup> Further, '[a]re some of us less human than others in time of war?'<sup>2</sup> These questions may call for answers more philosophical than those Hanley's writing could encompass, but the subject matter of *The German Prisoner* raises questions about the relative barbarism of different kinds of violence committed within the 'legitimising' frame of war that the restrained language of the officer-writers, such as in Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* or Robert Graves's *Goodbye To All That* did not raise.

As outlined in the 'Introduction', little critical work has been written about *The German Prisoner*. Anne Rice argues that the novella 'exposes and indicts rather than celebrates the culture of war through its emphasis on the release of repressed desire through atrocity'.<sup>3</sup> Joseph Pridmore further develops this idea by stating that the purpose of the novella 'is to subvert certain key bourgeois concepts associated with the Great War'.<sup>4</sup> Pridmore presents the view that, in *The German Prisoner*, James Hanley challenges the 'sexual ideals associated with upper-class officers [and] the ideals they were supposed to be fighting for'.<sup>5</sup> The 'sexual ideals' to which Pridmore alludes are inconsistent with the sort of scatological homoerotic desire presented in Hanley's story, extending at the very most to the kind of sublimated homoeroticism familiar in officers' depictions of the war, or at least beloved of critics such as Patrick Campbell, in his *Siegfried Sassoon: A Study of the War Poetry* or Adrian Caesar in his *Taking it like a Man: Suffering, Sexuality and the War Poets*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Kassimeris, 'The Barbarisation of Warfare: A User's Manual' in *The Barbarisation of Warfare*, ed. by George Kassimeris (London: Hurst and Company, 2006), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Rice, "A Peculiar Power About Rottenness": Annihilating Desire in James Hanley's "The German Prisoner", p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Pridmore, 'Feeling is like poison and a certain kind of high explosive': torture, homoeroticism and subversion in James Hanley's *The German Prisoner*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Campbell, *Siegfried Sassoon: A Study of the War Poetry* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1999) and Adrian Caesar, *Taking It Like A Man: Suffering, Sexuality and The War Poets* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993).



who give accounts of such depictions. Homoeroticism is a term that, as considered by Sarah Cole in her *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War*, was viewed to be 'erotic language, imagery or sentiment organized around members of the same sex, which need not be connected with specific, named, or conscious sexuality'.<sup>1</sup> It is argued in this chapter that, to use the term homoeroticism in the context of this novella, as do Anne Rice and Joseph Pridmore, is problematic and, as such, will be challenged.

In *The German Prisoner* friendship is shown to produce a very different outcome to that outlined by Sarah Cole. Indeed the relationship between O'Garra and Elston leads to extreme violence and degrading acts perpetrated by them upon Otto Reiburg, the man referred to in the novella's title. Violence, sexuality and friendship, and their interconnectedness in Hanley's text, recast what are familiar terms in the officers' war writing. In the writing of men such as Siegfried Sassoon or Robert Graves violence is no longer depicted as decorous or noble, but it is still within the norms of war, and are still presented within a conventional aesthetic frame. Sexuality, in the form of a homoeroticism that is discreet, is sublimated into other kinds of feelings, ones not typically expressed through the body. The idea of a friendship between soldiers that is cerebral and emotional rather than physical and instinctive, and friendship rather than other kinds of a more disturbing bond or alignment, is undermined and recast in relation to Hanley's depiction of unfamiliar and unprepossessing characters - alongside the shocking storyline.

### **Two Working-Class Soldiers**

The biggest question about Hanley's novella here is exactly what link the author is drawing between O'Garra and Elton's actions, in their privatised violence on the battlefield and the pre-war lives of the men. Both soldiers share a similar urban, working-class background with

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 255.

each apparently at a distance from their own communities; Elston is portrayed as stating: ‘There is nothing I long for so much as to get back to the smoke and fog and grease of Manchester. I like the filth and rottenness because it is warm. Yes, I long to get back to my little corner, my little world’ (9). There is the suggestion of Elston’s separation from his peers in Hanley’s repetition of the pronoun ‘my’ to indicate his restricted ‘world’, one that is defined by ‘smoke [...] fog [...] grease [...] filth [and] rottenness’. All but the third term are transposed directly into Hanley’s description of the trenches: ‘Out of the smoke and stench there came sounds of moaning’ (16). Later in the novella ‘the fog had blotted everything out’ (21). Further, the men are described advancing over ‘[r]otten ground’ (26) while Elston, upon initially seeing Otto Reiburg perceived ‘all the rottenness that was his life had suddenly shot up as filth from a sewer’ (25). Thus, it is argued, elements of Elston’s pre-war ‘world’ extends onto the battlefield, and to the violence he perpetrates upon Reiburg. For Elston, ‘rottenness was his life’. One can extrapolate from Hanley’s brief description of Elston that such a debased view of life was what separates the Mancunian from his milieu.

James Hanley provides a far more detailed background of the Irishman:

Peter O’Garra was forty-four years of age. He came from Tara Street, known as the filthiest street in all Dublin. He lodged there with a Mrs. Doolan, an old hag who looked more like a monstrous spider than a woman. O’Garra was very well known in Tara Street. In those fifteen years he had been known as, “a strange man – a misanthrope – a Belfast Bastard (his birth-place) – a lousy bugger – a rake – a closet – a quiet fellow – a tub of guts – a pimp – a shit-house – a toad – a sucker – a blasted sod – a Holy Roller – a Tara Lemon – a Judas – a jumped up liar – a book-worm – a traitor to Ireland – a pervert – an Irish jew – an Irish Christ – a clod.” (8).

O’Garra is ‘a quiet fellow [and] a book-worm [and] a Holy Roller’, thereby perhaps suggesting a desire for solitude, a degree of education and a certain religious belief.

However, he is also apparently separated from his working class Irish community.

Labelled as ‘a traitor to Ireland’, possibly because he enlisted, although no definitive reason is provided, O’Garra’s rejection by his home country is reinforced by the manner in which both ‘Irish’ and ‘Tara’ are used ironically as negative epithets by the Irish themselves

when connected to O'Garra's betrayal of his identity. His presumed homosexuality, 'a lousy bugger' and 'a blasted sod' - terms used again in an abusive context later in the novella, this time by O'Garra himself against Otto Reiburg - was connected by those working-class Irishmen amongst whom he used to live with his betrayal of Ireland. It also evokes a working-class identity that allowed no place for solitude or book-learning, let alone a sexual orientation that went against what society viewed as acceptable. The position of Hanley's narrator is ambiguous in this respect, however, not fully colluding with these colourful voices, but letting an implied connection persist between O'Garra's origins and his later violent depravity.

One can note, however, a phenomenon that finds more positive depictions elsewhere: a kind of internal differentiation between the working-class, one whereby O'Garra is ostracised and reviled by those only slightly better off than he is. This notion of gradation within a class is, in *The German Prisoner*, different from that idea advanced by Harold Perkin, as discussed in the Introduction, that such differentiation is based upon one's employment. The difference in one's position within the working class extends, in Perkin's view, from 'skilled craftsman, [to] skilled and semi-skilled factory workers and the unskilled labourers'.<sup>1</sup> Yet in Hanley's novella there is an additional determiner; namely, society's view of one's morals. O'Garra could conceivably not fit into Perkin's theory because '[i]t was rumoured that [O'Garra] had never worked' (8). As such one could suggest that his segregation from others is, in part, driven both by the combination of unemployment, and perhaps unwillingness to work, and how others view his morality. Indeed in Hanley's use of the word 'pimp' to describe O'Garra these two positions unite thereby highlighting the Irishman's parasitic tendencies to use others for his own ends. Elsewhere in this thesis it has been argued that enlisting as an Irishman might make one more objective about, and distant

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, p. 104.

from, the conflict in certain respects. However, here it is perhaps suggested that it compounds O'Garra's isolation and so pushes men like him further towards a kind of sociopathy, one whereby they become gratuitously violent with the war as a pretext.

A further indication of the threatening side of O'Garra's character emerges when one is informed that, in Dublin, O'Garra 'used to stand beneath the clock in Middle-Abbey Street, stalking women, all of whom are supposed to have fled in terror' (8). Hanley's use of the word 'stalking' brings to the fore the notion of predation. Hanley refrains from explaining the Irishman's actions, but in peacetime the circumstances are such that there appears to be no outlet for O'Garra's predilections, no release for his '[r]ottenness' (30).

James Hanley, it is argued, situates the pre-war O'Garra within an environment that reflects his character. The place in which O'Garra lived, 'Tara Street', is in the centre of Dublin, close to O'Connell Street and the River Liffey. This location connects O'Garra to the working class while simultaneously placing him outside of that group due to his lack of employment. Prior to the First World War Tara Street could be described as being 'the filthiest street in all Dublin' simply because it was a slum area inhabited by only the poorest families. Further, however, before 1914 there were only two public baths in Dublin, the first of which was built on Tara Street, located near to the docks where men unloaded coal from merchant ships. It can be suggested that Tara Street was as largely James Hanley described; the dock-workers could have used the facility to clean themselves as, due to their manual labour, they would have been, as Kevin Hearn describes in his *Dublin Tenement Life*, 'black from head to foot'.<sup>1</sup> Due to these facilities it is a location that appears in other literature: Leopold Bloom, in the 'Calypso' section of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, prior to attending Paddy Dignam's funeral, wonders: 'have I time for a bath this morning. Tara street [*sic*]'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin C. Hearn, *Dublin Tenement Life: an Oral History* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1996), p.99.

<sup>2</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 83.

The relevance of Tara Street to this thesis is to position O'Garra within an urban working-class environment, one presented with few redeeming features and, indeed, as a place to which individuals, such as Leopold Bloom, visited in order to cleanse themselves of the city's grime, and from which they then escaped. In this respect Tara Street can be viewed as a repository for Dublin's dirt. O'Garra's pre-war experience is that of an abject underclass labourer in Dublin's lowest strata of the working class who, ironically, may not have been able to use the Tara Street washhouse because, as Joseph V. O'Brien noted in his *Dear, Dirty Dublin*, there was a charge for their use, 'a circumstance detrimental to the cleanliness of the Great Unwashed'.<sup>1</sup> O'Garra's dirt, it can be suggested, was not a sign of work, as is the case in Hanley's *Our Time is Gone*, as will become apparent in the next chapter. Rather, as in the Irishman's wartime experience, it is symbolic of his depravity.

In this chapter 'filth' has a dual meaning as it is both a physical substance and a characteristic that manifests itself in O'Garra's actions against Otto Reiburg. It seems to garner negative moral connotations in this novella, although these adverse qualities are themselves, on one level, worn as a badge of pride by the two Entente soldiers. This raises questions about Hanley's treatment of class, and is all the more strange given that, as will become apparent in the following chapter, dirt in *Our Time is Gone* is shown to be a positive aspect of working life. Elston and O'Garra carry it, both metaphorically and physically, but it is not a product of work connected with the conflict. War here, unlike - as will be seen in Hanley's *Our Time is Gone* - stops being identified as and with labour, a valued activity. In *The German Prisoner* dirty work, as violence, becomes a source of perverted pleasure. It thereby amplifies the idea of ambiguous joy that has been noted in MacGill's novel *Fear!*,

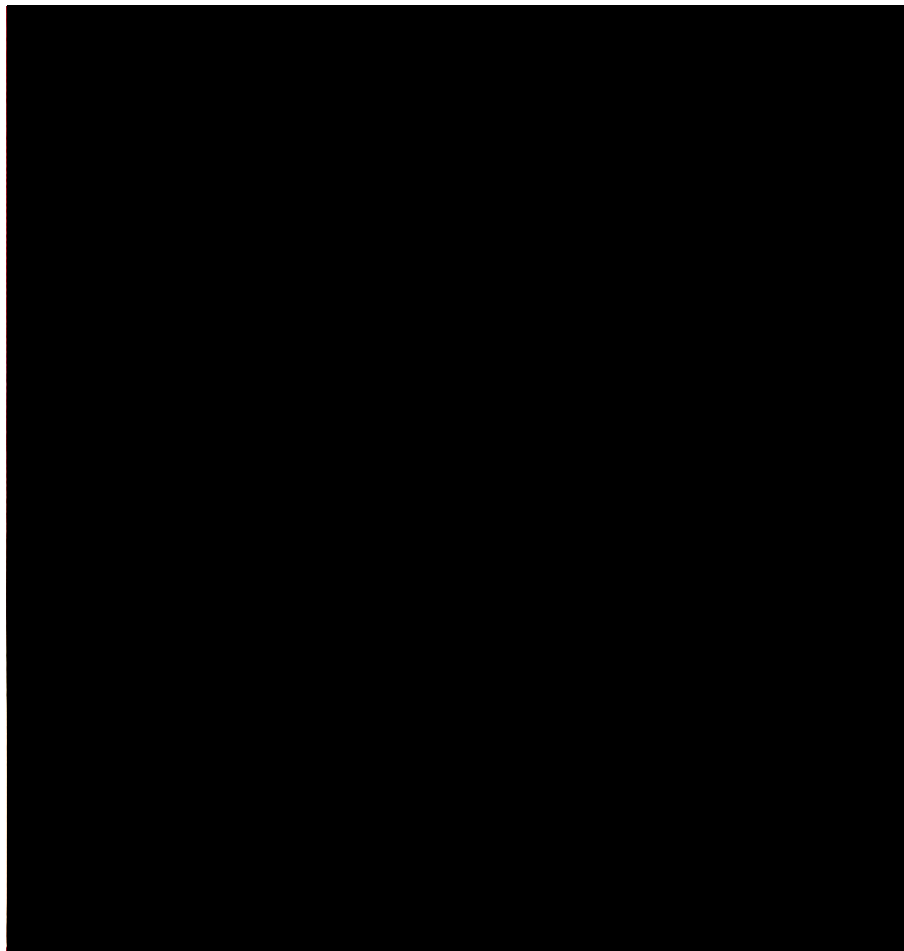
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<sup>1</sup> Joseph V. O'Brien, *Dear, Dirty Dublin: A City in Distress, 1899 – 1916* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 102.

when Ryder bayonets the German soldier, and as such permits the questions detailed earlier in this chapter to be advanced.

### **James Hanley's Use Of Roman Catholic Imagery**

The portrayal of extreme violence against Otto Reiburg singles out James Hanley's novella as unique in texts that depict life in the First World War. In this discussion an aspect connected to *The German Prisoner* that has not been previously considered is the manner in which Hanley challenges the tenets upon which the war rested through his undermining of a religious basis to the notion of self-sacrifice in war, specifically in his depiction of Otto Reiburg's death as a perversion of Christ's crucifixion. A reinforcement of this association is provided on the outer fly-leaf for the novella (Figure Six):



**Figure Six**

This image was completed by the Vorticist artist William Roberts, a man who, as detailed earlier, not only frequented the Progressive Bookshop but ‘knew the Lahrs intimately’.<sup>1</sup> Roberts had also fought in the war as a private, having enlisted, in 1916, into the Royal Field Artillery as a gunner. He then applied, in April 1918, despite being a first generation Irishman in England, for the position of the official war artist for the Canadian War Records Office - to which he was appointed. The fact that Roberts fought in the war adds a degree of authenticity to his drawing, as he experienced life on the frontline exactly as did the MacGill, Hanley and O’Flaherty; indeed all four were working-class men of Irish heritage who served in the ranks.

In its angular style Roberts’ image depicts two British soldiers, identifiable by their Brodie shrapnel helmets, standing over another man kneeling on the floor with his eyes closed. The first of the Entente soldiers has his arm underneath the crook of the elbow of the collapsed man, and each British combatant extends one oversized hand over the recumbent individual - in a position reminiscent of a priest carrying out a blessing. The uniform of the second British soldier gives the appearance of a Catholic priest’s robes complete with a stole, reinforced by the fact that the sleeve on his right arm only ends fractionally below the elbow. The first soldier is depicted as looking upward, toward a distant hill upon which the skeletal outlines of trees appear as though crosses. A sense of movement is apparent in the image depicted by the angular lines of Roberts’ drawing, which point upwards, towards the crosses, thereby conveying a sense that the British soldiers are moving the prostrate soldier along a broken duckboard toward the hill. This cover imagery foregrounds the notion that Reiburg is killed in a manner that can be viewed as Hanley’s re-working of Christ’s crucifixion.

At this stage it is necessary to briefly contextualise the violence Hanley’s narrative depicts being perpetrated upon a soldier who has surrendered, and therefore, can be classified

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<sup>1</sup> Huw Osborne, ‘Counter-Space in Charles Lahr’s Progressive Bookshop’, p. 134.

as a non-combatant. As Niall Ferguson argues in his 'Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing', the killing in cold-blood of those who surrendered was an illegal act, contrary to Regulation 23c of the Hague Convention. In fact the notion of its illegality had, by 1914, been incorporated into the British *Manual of Military Law*.<sup>1</sup>

Despite such provision in law, however, the reality was very different and, as Niall Ferguson posits elsewhere: 'men on both sides were killed not only as they tried to surrender but after they had surrendered. These are, it might be said, the forgotten 'atrocities' of the First World War'.<sup>2</sup> James Hanley draws the reader's attention to such "atrocities" because, having entered No Man's Land, O'Garra and Elston become separated from their comrades in fog, out of which comes 'a young German soldier. His hands were stuck high in the air. He was weaponless'<sup>3</sup>: Reiburg surrenders; he is no longer a combatant.

In depicting the German's demise Hanley re-appropriates, as noted above, the image of the crucifixion - imbuing it not with a notion of redemptive sacrifice but a sense of waste:

"I once saw an aerial photograph of these same trenches. Took it off a Jerry who crashed. Looked like a huge crucifix in shape."

"You mean a cross," said O'Garra.

"Yes."

"H'm'. Cross. The bloody country is littered with them. I once saw one of those crosses, with its figures of Jesus plastered in shite. Down on the Montauban road."

"Had someone deliberately plastered it?" asked Elston.

"No. A five-nine landed behind it, and the figure pitched into one of those latrines," replied O'Garra<sup>4</sup>.

"Did you ever make a point of studying the different features of those figures?" asked Elston.

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<sup>1</sup> Niall Ferguson, 'Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing: the Dynamics of Defeat, Surrender and Barbarity in the Age of Total War' in *The Barbarisation of Warfare*, ed. by George Kassimeris (London: Hirst and Company, 2006), p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 369.

<sup>3</sup> James Hanley, *The German Prisoner*, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> A 'five-nine' is a type of German shell.



“Saw half-a-dozen. Didn’t bother after that. Reminded me of the Irish Christ. All blood and tears.” (12-13)

Hanley, in this passage, frames the action in a religious context by equating the battleground to a cross, while simultaneously depriving the symbol of the sense of worth, or promise of transcendence, that such an image usually contains. O’Garra’s distinction as to the appearance of the ground is important, for it brings to the reader’s mind an empty object. Here the cross is waiting to be used, something apparent in William Roberts’ image, whereas a crucifix already holds the body that signifies in Roman Catholicism, with regard to Christ, that the redemptive process is underway.

In Hanley’s depiction of this modern crucifixion it is the ground, the battlefield that becomes the framing motif onto which the dead German soldier is symbolically placed by O’Garra and Elston. Prior to looking at Hanley’s portrayal of this event it is appropriate to consider how the author had already rejected any notion of the sacred being associated with the crucifix. As noted in the previous chapter, Patrick MacGill, in his poem ‘A Soldier’s Prayer’, was respectful in the language he used, addressing Christ as ‘O Lord’, although he was certainly not writing an optimistic poem about the war. Hanley, through his depiction of ‘figures of Jesus plastered in shite’ is being more than simply blasphemous, even if the treatment of a religious object could be viewed as such: he is foregrounding an image that suggests something that is central to the novella; namely, that death in battle is wasteful. Hanley does this by connecting the image of Christ with human waste and the word ‘shite’, a term that, with its variant ‘shit’, is repeated constantly throughout the text, for instance, O’Garra is described as ‘a shit-house’, Reiburg as a ‘lump of shite’ (19), while the ground into which the German’s body disappears as a ‘shit-hole’ (27). Not only is the actual crucifix covered in human waste but, symbolically, Reiburg is also crucified into, and on, such detritus.

This imagery of the figure of Christ connected to ‘shit’ undermines any notion of purity associated with the crucifixion, a position reinforced by the sentiment contained in O’Garra’s observation that the roadside crucifixes ‘[r]eminded me of the Irish Christ. All blood and tears’ (13). In order to explore this view it is worth noting that the symbolism contained within Hanley’s references to the crucifix in *The German Prisoner* – and, as will be explored in the following chapter in *Our Time is Gone* – is fundamentally at odds with any idea of glorious self-sacrifice in British propaganda. Yet this scathing reference to the Irish Christ can also be seen to run counter to another prominent glorification of blood sacrifice in recent history, that of the Irish republican Padriag Pearse, a figure of enormous cultural significance to the Irish at this time following his near-martyrdom at the hands of the British following the 1916 Easter uprising. Indeed Pearse wrote in the Irish language pamphlet to his ‘Irish-Ireland’ school in Dublin that ‘[boys should] spend their lives working hard and zealously for the fatherland and, if it should ever be necessary, to die for it’.<sup>1</sup> Pearse’s writing, constructing a cultural framework for martyrdom through poetry and prose in the years leading up to April 1916, reveals that he viewed his death for the betterment of Ireland via an analogy with messianic martyrdom.

This sacred impulse in Pearse’s writing carries with it a long tradition: images of Christ’s blood have been present in Irish writing for centuries. Salvador Ryan, in his “No Milkless Cow”: The Cross of Christ in Medieval Irish Literature’, discusses the importance of imagery depicting Christ’s blood for Irish Bardic Poetry: ‘[t]he power of the cross to crush sin is implicitly linked to the fact that it was soaked in the Lord’s blood’.<sup>2</sup> To illustrate this view Ryan quotes from the fifteenth-century poem *Ceithre croinn croch De*, written by the

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<sup>1</sup> Padraig Pearse quoted in translation in Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Salvador Ryan, “No Milkless Cow”: The Cross of Christ in Medieval Irish Literature’ in *Studies in Church History: The Church and Literature* 48, ed. by Peter Clarke and Charlotte Methuen (Abingdon: Boydell Press, 2012), p. 98.

Franciscan-friar-poet Philip Bocht O hUiginn: ‘Glory was given the cross by the blood of his dying limbs, the bluntness and the hardness of the nail – could torture be greater? – burning his white hand which unlocked his grace’.<sup>1</sup> In this Irish text one can note the image of Christ’s blood glorifying the cross upon which he is crucified.

It is within this context that, between 1913 and 1916, Irishmen such as Thomas MacDonagh, Joseph Plunkett and Patrick Pearse incorporated the notion of blood sacrifice in their nationalist writing. As G.F. Dalton argues in his ‘The Tradition of Blood Sacrifice to the Goddess Eire’, Pearse ‘assimilated Cuchulain to Christ, and himself to both [saw] himself as the new Messiah, whose death would redeem the people’.<sup>2</sup> In his text *The Coming Revolution* (1913) Pearse expressed the view that ‘bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing’.<sup>3</sup> This position encapsulated his concept of Christ-like martyrdom. In a sense Pearse was presenting himself as an Irish Christ because, he believed, his ‘blood sacrifice’ would assist Ireland in achieving its freedom from the British Empire.

As S.W. Gilley posits in his ‘Pearse’s sacrifice: Christ and Cuchulain crucified and risen in the Easter Rising, 1916’ there is, in the Irishman’s work, ‘an identity between the nation, Christ, the victim who dies for it and Pearse’.<sup>4</sup> All of these themes come together in Pearse’s play, *The Singer* (1916), in which MacDara, the man of the play’s title, loses his faith but rekindles it through the passion of the people: ‘The people, Maoilscheachlainn [a schoolteacher], the dumb suffering people: reviled and outcast, yet pure and splendid and

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Bocht, Poem 5, stanza 9 quoted in Salvador Ryan, “‘No Milkless Cow’: The Cross of Christ in Medieval Irish Literature”, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> G.F. Dalton, ‘The Tradition of Blood Sacrifice to the Goddess Eire’ in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, (Vol. 63 No. 252, Winter 1974), p. 353.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Pearse, ‘The Coming Revolution’ in *The Coming Revolution: The Political Writings and Speeches of Patrick Pearse* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2012), p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> S.W. Gilley, ‘Pearse’s sacrifice: Christ and Cuchulain crucified and risen in the Easter Rising, 1916’ in *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology*, ed. S.W. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 226.

faithful. In them I saw, or seemed to see again, the Face of God. Ah, it is tear-stained face, blood-stained, defiled with ordure, but it is the Holy Face!’<sup>1</sup>

Pearse’s sentiments as expressed in the extract above from *The Singer*, contains imagery similar to that used by James Hanley in *The German Prisoner*. What is important for this discussion is James Hanley’s re-appropriation of both the act of crucifixion and, as an Irish writer, the symbolism and importance of blood sacrifice to a cause of independence. The Entente went to war fighting Germany, and Irishmen such as Pearse fought the British army in Ireland. Both used the same word, sacrifice, to assist their respective causes. In the phrase ‘Irish Christ. All blood and tears’, Hanley’s text, superficially resonates with Pearse’s views by recognising that Christ shed his blood for the benefit of humanity. Hanley, however, subverts that message, to an even greater degree because, unlike Pearse - who saw Christ in the faces of the Irish but whose ‘tear-stained face[s]’ were ‘defiled with odure’ by the British - Hanley actually portrays Christ as covered in excrement: ‘Jesus plastered in shite’.

The notion that Hanley’s depiction of the crucifixion undermines any sense of purification emerges when one begins to consider the violent act perpetrated upon Reiburg. The location of the German’s death symbolically resembles the place where Christ was crucified. In *The German Prisoner* O’Garra describes the shell-hole into which he and Elston, and then Reiburg, fall: ‘the place stinks. Perhaps we are on very old ground. Rotten ground; mashy muddy ground. Christ the place must be full of these mangy dead [it is] a shit-hole’ (26-27). The shell-hole is polluted due to the fact that it was a site in which numerous men had, in earlier battles, been killed. This chimes with the Biblical representation of Christ’s crucifixion; St. John’s Gospel describes how ‘[t]hey took charge of Jesus, and

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<sup>1</sup> Padraig Pearse, ‘The Singer’ in *The Collected Works of Padraic H. Pearse: Plays, Stories, Poems* (London and Dublin: Maunsel and Co., 1917), p. 34.

carrying His own cross He went out of the city to the place of the skull or, as it was called in Hebrew, Golgotha'.<sup>1</sup> The word 'Golgotha' denotes a site of internment, a place of death. Therefore, just as Christ was killed at a place previously the site of death, so is Reiburg. Following crucifixions the Romans left the bodies of the dead in situ, creating as a warning another 'rotten ground'.<sup>2</sup>

Up to this point associations with the Biblical crucifixion in Hanley's work have, largely, been ironic ones, constructing in Reiburg's death a perverted version of Christ's - yet without any notion of redemption. There is one aspect, however, in which Hanley makes a more straightforward connection, where the German soldier is presented as a figure of innocence, in contrast to the moral corruption of O'Garra and Elston:

He was a youth, about eighteen years of age, tall, with a form as graceful as a young sapling, in spite of the ill-fitting uniform and unkempt appearance. His hair, which stuck out in great tufts from beneath his forage cap, was as fair as ripe corn. He had blue eyes and finely moulded features [...] Elston, on making contact with the youth's soft skin, became almost demented. The velvety touch of the flesh infuriated him. Perhaps it was because Nature had hewn him differently. Had denied him the young German's grace of body, the fair hair, the fine clear eyes that seemed to reflect all the beauty and music and rhythm of the Rhine. (24, 32)

Descriptions of Christ, as is apparent in historical sources, note his athleticism and beauty, often describing him as having Caucasian features, such as in the portrayal attributed to Publius Lentulus the Governor of Judea, addressed to the Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar, where Christ is depicted with 'His eyes bright blue, clear and serene'.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the urban corruption of O'Garra and Elston, the German has qualities connected to nature and fertility. Reiburg is depicted with hair described as 'ripe' corn, a word which denotes a sense of growth and health. The German is presented as having 'blue' and 'clear' eyes which, when combined with the fact that his features are 'finely moulded', contrasts with O'Garra's 'ugly mouth that used to frighten women' (8), and 'eyes [that] resembled the dried up beds of

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<sup>1</sup> Gospel of St. John, 19: 17, *The Jerusalem Bible*.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bible-history.com> [Accessed 18 March 2014].

<sup>3</sup> Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Jesus* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001), p. 69.

African lakes' (9). As becomes apparent later in the chapter, O'Garra treats Reiburg as a scapegoat, which can actually be viewed as paralleling Christ's circumstances. An element of that, moreover, is due to the Irishman's pre-war experiences. The hardships he suffered in Dublin - 'the rather drab life of Tara Street, with its lousiness, its smells, its human animals herded together, its stinkin' mattresses' (9) - manifest themselves physically, which is in complete contrast to the 'grace' and 'beauty' represented by the prisoner.

The 'velvety' quality of Reiburg's 'soft skin' is a catalyst for the murder of the German. In the novella Hanley depicts touch between men marching in a column to the front as a means of reassurance, such as '[b]y feeling with their hands [men] became aware they were in line'. (11) Yet in this initial representation of Reiburg, that notion becomes corrupted through Elston's actions. What had been 'an occasional feel of hand or bayonet, to establish contact' (12) now generates a 'demented' feeling, suggestive of a degree of uncontrolled madness. This is further reinforced by reference to the word 'rotteness':

[t]here was something stirring in this weasel's [Elston's] blood. He knew not what it was. But there was a strange and powerful force possessing him, and it was going to use him as his instrument [...] There was something repugnant, something revolting in those eyes, in their leer, and in the curled lips. Was it that in that moment itself, all the rottenness that was his life had suddenly shot up as filth from a sewer, leaving him helpless in everything but the act he was going to commit? O'Garra was watching Elston [...] There is a peculiar power about rottenness, in that it feeds on itself, borrows from itself, and its tendency is always downward. That very action had seized the polluted imagination of the Irishman. He was helpless. Rottenness called to him; called to him from the pesty frame of Elston. (25, 30)

The word 'rotteness', as has been discussed, was previously used by Hanley to describe Elston's life in Manchester and, as such, can form a link between the pre-war and wartime lives of the British soldiers. The war, however, provides an environment in which such a characteristic might find an outlet due to Hanley's narrative. It conveys Elston's contact with Reiburg, and provides the focus for 'all the rottenness' to explode. In an image that also connects implicitly with the word 'shit', and its attendant subversion of any notion of

cleansing that might be attributed to crucifixion, Elston's 'rottenness' rises as 'filth from a sewer'.

Hanley uses several examples of repetition in the above passage which forces the reader to focus upon the author's depiction of the evil apparent within O'Garra and Elston. On the one hand there are repeated consonants in the alliterative phrases 'there was something stirring in this weasel's blood' and '[t]here is a peculiar power about rottenness [...]'. The reader must slow down their pace in these sentences, which draws one's attention to Elston's characteristics. Hanley uses to similar effect elongated vowel sounds: words such as 'leer' and 'curled' extend the reader's pronunciation, thereby emphasising the actions they depict. The 'leer' in Elston's eyes also contrasts with the 'fine clear eyes' of Reiburg. Hanley's depiction of such characteristics in the British soldiers serves to reinforce the extent to which any sense of redemption is removed from the perverted crucifixion of Reiburg. The men who perpetrate such an act, O'Garra and Elston, are themselves without any redemptive qualities; rather than being noble men fighting in a worthwhile cause, Hanley depicts them as soldiers for whom the war presents an opportunity to satisfy the sexual cravings of their 'polluted imagination[s]' (30), for example to 'back-scuttle the bugger [Reiburg]' (33).

It is in this context that the word 'homo-erotic', as used by Joseph Pridmore in his essay detailed earlier, may be challenged - precisely because of the supposed 'rottenness' within the two British soldiers. As discussed earlier, the definition of homoeroticism provided by Sarah Cole states that it has, at its core, 'erotic language, imagery or sentiment'. Just such imagery appears in Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man*, when the author meets a fellow officer, the fictionalised Dick Tiltwood. This figure is, in reality David Thomas, with whom, as Jean Moorcroft Wilson noted in her biography, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet*, '[Sassoon] fell deeply in love':

He looked up at me. Twilight was falling and there was only one small window, but even in the half-light his face surprised me by its candour and freshness. He had the

obvious good looks which go with fair hair and firm features, but it was the radiant integrity of his expression which astonished me [...] His tone of voice was simple and reassuring like his appearance [...] Dick made all the difference to my life at Clitherland [army camp].<sup>1</sup>

There is a degree of idealisation in Sassoon's description that ties in with feelings of sensuality. In his memoir Sassoon describes the times he spent with Tiltwood, riding horses, talking about fox-hunting until his friend was shot - at which point Sassoon admitted 'I knew Death then'.<sup>2</sup>

What James Hanley portrays in his novella, however, is not homoeroticism. Rather it is a homophobic representation of homosexual desire which, as will become apparent, is presented as sadomasochism. That O'Garra and Elston are attributed language that is potentially homosexual is not disputed: they 'lay [...] facing each other' (TGP/7); Elston is O'Garra's 'bed-mate' (10), while the Englishman 'felt like back-scuttling' (35) Reiburg. However, the language they use to describe the German soldier, 'sod [...] bugger [...]' together with their scatological language such as 'Shit on you' (25), is tinged with homophobia. Their desire, it is argued, is predicated upon the exertion of power over an individual, such as was exercised in pre-war Dublin upon O'Garra who himself, as discussed earlier, was called 'a lousy bugger' and 'a blasted sod'.

The 'power [and] rottenness' described by Hanley as being released within Elston and then O'Garra then manifests itself in action:

[Elston] spat savagely into the German's face [...] O'Garra commenced to kick the prisoner in the face until it resembled a piece of raw beef [Elston] kicked the German in the mid-riff, making him scream like a stuck pig. It was this scream that loosed all the springs of action in the Manchester man. It cut him to the heart, this scream. Impotency and futility seemed as ghouls leering at him, goading him, maddening him. He started to kick the youth in the face too. But now no further sound came from that inert heap. (25, 27-28)

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet* (London: Duckworth, 1998), p. 196 and Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, pp. 337-338.

<sup>2</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, p. 383.



Elston's and O'Garra's violence toward Reiburg begins a re-working in the novella, it is argued, of the attack upon the captured Christ, and his subsequent degradation, at the hands of Roman soldiers, as is recounted in the Gospel of Matthew: 'they spat on [Christ] and took the reed and struck him on the head with it'.<sup>1</sup> For Elston and O'Garra their only means of responding to lifelong 'impotency and futility', to achieve a degree of agency - however perverted that might be - is to inflict violence upon another private soldier. Reiburg becomes a scapegoat for the pre-war and wartime frustrations of both men, as O'Garra expresses:

"all the inconveniences. All the actions, rebuffs, cold nights, lice, toothaches, forced absences from women, nights in trenches up to your knees in mud. Burial parties, mopp-ing-up parties, dead horses, heaps of stale shite, heads, balls, brains, everywhere. All of those things" (30-31).

For Hanley, the scourging of Christ is lurid and personal. By contrast, in MacGill's poem 'a Soldier's Prayer' it is the modernity of war, attacking Christ as the crucifix is 'shrapnel-scourged', and as modern warfare cause Christ's injury. In both MacGill's and Hanley's works, however, the violence depicted is thoroughly secular.

Like MacGill's 'Mute' Christ, Reiburg has his ability to speak coherently taken away from him. The prisoner is only being able to utter repeated, single words: "Ah\_\_\_\_" and "Water\_\_\_\_" (30-32). As Elaine Scarry argues in her *The Body in Pain*, 'torture consists of a primary act, the infliction of pain, and a primary verbal act, the interrogation [...] World, self, and voice are lost, or nearly lost, through the intense pain of torture'.<sup>2</sup> This is exactly what happens to Reiburg. Humans, through their ability to communicate, occupy a wider sphere of influence than that defined by their physical presence as one's use of words permits one to occupy space outside of the body. Here, by contrast, the German soldier's world is reduced as his limited vocabulary exemplifies.

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<sup>1</sup> Gospel of Mathew, 27:30-31, *The Jerusalem Bible*.

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 28 and 35.

The British soldiers' attempts to accrue information from Reiburg are minimal, for their chief focus is the infliction of pain. Oddly oblique, even obscure questions are used to verbally taunt Reiburg; an element, it is argued, of humiliation. O'Garra begins:

"FOG. Yes fog. FOG. FOG. FOG. FOG. FOG. Jesus sufferin' Christ. FOG. FOG. FOG. HA, HA, HA, HA, HA. In your eyes, in your mouth, on your chest, in your heart. FOG. FOG."

"There you are," screamed Elston into the German's ear, for suddenly seized with panic by the terrific outburst from O'Garra, he had fallen headlong into the hole. The eyes seemed to roll in his head, as he screamed: "There you are. Can you hear it? You. Can you hear it? You ucker from Muenchen, with your fair hair, and your lovely face that we bashed in for you. Can you hear it? We're trapped here. Through you. Through you and your bloody lot. If only you hadn't come. You baby. You soft stupid little runt. Hey! Hey! Can you hear me?"

The two men now fell upon the prisoner, and with peculiar movements of the hands began to mangle the body. (32)

Language on both sides is no longer a vehicle through which meaning can be conveyed.

O'Garra's repetition conveys an element of frenzy that is also apparent physically in Elston, when '[his] eyes seemed to roll into his head'. Hanley's repeated use of the word 'screamed' conveys a sense of intimidation, as the two soldiers take verbal control. Nonetheless the language is without meaning. The subject to which Elton refers remains as unclear, is 'it' the war? Or the fog? If it is the latter, then the questions are nonsensical. Ultimately the meaning is immaterial because, as Elaine Scarry notes it is 'the infliction of pain' that is the primary physical motivator.

Reiburg's use of the word 'water' in the context of the acts perpetrated upon him permits one to consider further how Hanley presents a perversion of the crucifixion. In 'The Gospel of St. John' it is recorded that Christ, when on the cross, said '*I am thirsty*'.<sup>1</sup> Following on from this, it is also noted in John's Gospel that one of the soldiers who crucified Christ 'pierced his side with a lance and immediately there came out blood and

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Gospel of St. John', *Jerusalem Bible*, 19: 18-19. Emphasis is in the original.

water [...] all this happened to fulfil the words of scripture [...] *They will look upon the one whom they have pierced*'.<sup>1</sup> As has been discussed earlier, Hanley described how the roadside crucifix reminded O'Garra of 'the Irish Christ. All blood and tears'. The beatings inflicted upon Reiburg resulted in his 'weeping' (25) while, following O'Garra's punch, '[a] stream of blood gush[ed] forth'. (27) Thus, in the spilling of the German's 'blood' and 'tears', the soldier's death further mirrors Christ's crucifixion.

In an even more shocking elaboration on, and perversion of, the act of piercing that characterises the Crucifixion, Hanley's prisoner is also brutally penetrated with a weapon:

O'Garra shouted:

"PULL his bloody trousers down."

With a wild movement Elston tore down the prisoner's trousers.

In complete silence O'Garra pulled out his bayonet and stuck it up the youth's anus. The German screamed [...] the prisoner, who rolled over, emit[ed] a single sigh – Ah - (32-33)

Dave Grossman describes in his *On Killing* how a bayonet becomes an extension of the soldier's arm: 'to reach out and penetrate the enemy's flesh and thrust a portion of ourselves into his vitals is deeply akin to the sexual act, yet deadly and is therefore strongly repulsive to us'.<sup>2</sup> In Patrick MacGill's *Fear!* the term 'joy' was used as a means to describe Ryder's survival, having killed the German soldier – albeit without any sexual connotation. In Hanley's text, however, the sexual potential of this act is emphasised throughout the sexually driven sadomasochistic murder of Reiburg.

After O'Garra pierces Reiburg with the bayonet, the Entente soldiers want the German out of their view: 'out of sight, out of mind' (35-36). It is the final act that ultimately illustrates how Reiburg's death is a perversion of the crucifixion: the soldiers decide to

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 19: 34-37. Emphasis is in the original.

<sup>2</sup> Dave Grossman, *On Killing*, p. 121.

‘dance on the bugger and bury him for ever’. (35) This process finally places Reiburg onto the ‘cross’ (12) that is the battlefield. O’Garra wants to be rid of the German prisoner because, as the Irishman exclaims: “Everything I look at becomes Him. Everything Him. (35) Hanley’s inclusion of capital letters in the personal pronoun places a final seal on the identification with Christ. In a further perversion of the Christian ideal, Hanley demonstrates how O’Garra identifies the German as the malevolent creator of everything around him on the battlefield which, in this instance, is the orchestrator of the war - together with its attendant suffering.

Hanley’s novella, finally, in its depiction of Reiburg’s death as a re-working of Christ’s crucifixion, goes further than merely recording that the First World War destroyed many people’s religious faith. In *The German Prisoner* Hanley uses religion in order to register, in an extreme manner, how death in war is a waste of life. This message is also presented by others; Patrick MacGill, for example, has been considered previously in this thesis. However, Hanley’s imagery goes further because he takes an image such as the crucifixion and perverts the Entente sentiment to such a degree that the text becomes truly shocking. The two British soldiers are working within the legitimising framework of war but their acts are, it can be suggested, very much outside of conduct expected from professional soldiers. The men carried out a murder in pursuit of their own sexual urges, yet Hanley’s text leaves the reader to decide upon the cause of the men’s individual desires: are the men merely a product of their abject working-class environment? Or are O’Garra and Elston simply criminals? James Hanley’s novella is the only text considered in this thesis that poses such questions. Yet to those individuals left at home, unaware of the violent nature of combat, provided the enemy are killed - and that, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is ultimately the role of an infantryman - does it matter how a man such as Otto Reiburg dies? Hanley’s inclusion of this moral dimension makes this work of just thirty-six pages relevant to

arguments surrounding the actions of soldiers being played out within the British judicial system even in 2017.

One can note that the actions carried out on Reiburg are clearly in contravention of Regulation 23c Hague Convention; but was it such an uncommon incident? Robert Graves, in his memoir *Goodbye To All That* provides an answer:

For true atrocities, that is, personal rather than military violations of the code of war, there were few opportunities. The most obvious opportunity was in the interval between surrender of prisoners and their arrival (or non-arrival) at headquarters. And it was an opportunity of which advantage was only too often taken.<sup>1</sup>

Graves alludes to such occurrences without detail. Edmund Blunden does not refer to any such events and neither does Siegfried Sassoon but the latter registers the notion of seeking revenge over the death of his close friend, and fellow officer, David Thomas, in a poem 'Peace'. The second verse states:

In my heart there's cruel war that must be waged,  
In darkness vile with moans and bleeding bodies maimed;  
A gnawing hunger drives me, wild to be assuaged,  
And bitter lust chuckles within me unashamed.<sup>2</sup>

However, in a diary entry two days later, he wrote '[w]hile I am really angry with the enemy, as I am lately, I must work it off, as these things don't last long with me as a rule'.<sup>3</sup>

Admittedly, this is not expressing a desire to commit an 'atrocious', but it is the closest Sassoon gets in his writing.

The significance of Sassoon's poem and diary entry can be viewed in two ways: either an officer such as Sassoon exerted more control over his emotions than working-class privates; or, alternatively, men such as he did not experience the level of exposure to combat that brought with it moments of desire for retribution. As Dave Grossman argues: '[men often] experienced a brief feeling of elation upon succeeding in killing the enemy. Usually

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye To All That* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Diaries: 1915-1918*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davies (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), p. 52. The poem 'Peace' is unpublished in any of Sassoon's collections.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

this euphoria stage is almost instantly overwhelmed by the guilt stage, as the soldier is faced with the undeniable evidence of what he has done'.<sup>1</sup> This was, as noted in the previous chapter, exactly what Patrick MacGill described of Ryder in *Fear!* following his killing of the enemy soldier. Yet this was not the case in relation to either O'Garra and Elston as they are killed moments later in a 'terrific explosion' (36). The men are dead, and no notion of sacrifice or salvation is apparent. Rather, the world simply carries on as before: 'the sea of mud oozed over them like the restless tide of an ever-lasting night' (TGP/36). Neither the sacrifice of the German prisoner's death nor that of the British soldiers is for any purpose: the war simply continues unabated.

## **Conclusion**

James Hanley, in his novella *The German Prisoner*, depicted what can be termed as illegal violence as the acts perpetrated by both the Irishman O'Garra and the Englishman Elston were seeking personal satisfaction, not military gain. Their actions against Otto Reiburg, an unarmed non-combatant after surrendering, amounted to an atrocity, a war crime committed to satisfy their 'rotteness'. As has been argued, the extent of their depravity was reinforced by Hanley's novella, portraying a perversion of Christ's crucifixion. This not only illustrates the circumstances of a barbaric death, but strips it of any notion of sacrifice - such as was attributed by many in society to deaths in battle. *The German Prisoner* is a text that stands not only obliquely vis-a-vis those considered in this thesis, but also in the wider body of First World War writing on account of its graphic nature.

Patrick MacGill's portrayal of combat, as has been noted, also depicted the brutality of warfare; his imagery in *The Red Horizon* and *The Great Push* brought the reality of life in the frontline to the reader. Yet it always remained within the bounds of actions within combat. Hanley's novella is very ambivalent, posing more questions to the reader than it

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Grossman, *On Killing*, p. 115.

provides answers, revealing as it does an aspect of war that was actually a relatively common occurrence on both sides but one, it can be suggested, that stood in opposition to what many would view as acceptable conduct by soldiers.

In the next chapter, James Hanley's novel *Our Time is Gone* moves away from the trenches of France to England and the civilian population. The conflict overseas was very much supported by men and women who, although not wearing military uniforms, undertook roles that underpinned the work undertaken by soldiers - such as the three Irish-writers examined here - and it is to these that this this thesis will move on to discuss next. James Hanley's text portrays working-class Irish men and women, civilians who are brought into direct contact with the war through their roles as merchant seamen or cleaners of vessels used in the war effort.

## Chapter Four: “A back like Jesus had”: Suffering In James Hanley’s *Our Time is Gone*

### Introduction

James Hanley shifts his focus to the home front in the novel considered in this chapter, *Our Time is Gone* (1940). In this text Hanley depicts the experiences of two groups underrepresented in literature of the conflict: merchant seamen and those on Britain’s home front. Like Patrick MacGill, Hanley also writes of Irish working-class, Roman Catholic individuals. Yet unlike the soldiers’ rural connections in MacGill’s works, Hanley’s texts portray men and women with links to, or who are actually living in, an urban environment. In so doing Hanley presents to the reader an Irish, Catholic, working-class, émigré community whose individual members were subject, locally, to sectarian abuse and discrimination from a more organizational perspective by the British government.

*Our Time is Gone* delineates what Mario Barrera has termed as ‘internal colonisation’ in his *Race and Class in the Southwest*, his definition of which is ‘a form of colonisation in which the dominant and subordinate populations are intermingled, so that there is no geographically distinct ‘metropolis’ separate from the colony’.<sup>1</sup> What Hanley portrays in this respect is Gelton, a fictional Liverpool, in which the working-class live within the confines of a city also populated by other stratas of society: clerks, solicitors and shipping company directors, for example. This is unlike what one often finds in texts that explore colonialism; works such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, as discussed earlier in the thesis, shows a colonial metropolis that exists at a distance from those they subjugate. Hanley extends the idea of coloniser/colonised in his depiction of the Catholic Irish working class because this community is subordinated further - albeit by other groups of a similar social standing such as the Protestant community - whose views about the conflict reflect those of what Barrera

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1979), p. 184. John Fordham also uses this term in his *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class*.



termed as the ‘dominant’ population. This therefore reinforces the notion of ‘internal colonisation’.

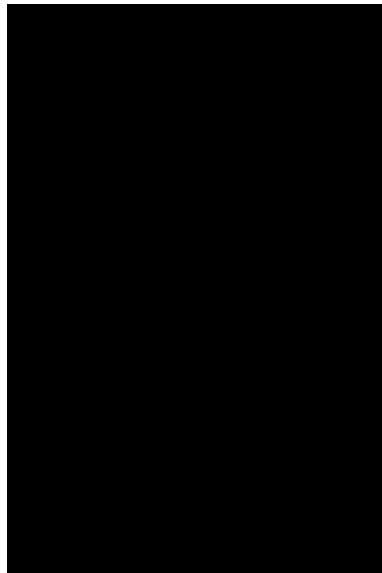
*Our Time is Gone* is the third novel in a series of five, all written between 1935 and 1958, which depict the lives of the Furys, a family in Gelton. As such the relationship of the working-class generally, and the Furys specifically, regarding the notion of ‘Internal colonisation’ has been established in the preceding texts, *The Furys* (1935) and *The Secret Journey* (1936). *Our Time is Gone* portrays the impact of the First World War upon men such as the text’s patriarch, Dennis Fury, who returns to service in the Merchant Navy following his retirement, while women are portrayed through their experiences on the home front via the matriarch, Fanny Fury. Brief mention will also be made in this chapter of Hanley’s short story ‘Narrative’ (1931) in which he depicts a merchant ship in Liverpool which on its subsequent voyage is sunk by a German submarine, leaving a number of sailors adrift in a lifeboat waiting, in vain, to be rescued.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Anthony Burgess noted of James Hanley that he ‘made fiction out of the action he himself had experienced’, a position that extended to his including, it is argued, elements of his pre-war life in Liverpool into *Our Time is Gone*. As has been discussed, Chris Gostick described the broad circumstances of Hanley’s early existence ‘[in] a tough, rough-and-ready working-class community, in which life was hard and frugal [...] Work was largely manual and casual, with men often fighting for jobs on the docks or ships, and steady wages uncertain. [...]’.<sup>1</sup> This is just precisely the community Hanley depicts in *Our Time is Gone*: ‘tough, rough-and ready [and] manual’; a pre-war world in which violence was an everyday occurrence if one was to survive, a position replicated in wartime for the soldiers and merchant seamen discussed in this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Gostick, ‘James Hanley’s Life’ in *Boy*, p. 182.

Central to this chapter's discussion of Hanley's novel is an examination of the social position occupied by Irish émigrés such as the Furys or their son-in-law, Joseph Kilkey. Clair Wills argues, in her 'Realism and the Irish Immigrant: Documentary, Fiction and Postwar Irish Labor' that 'the fictional world of the urban British working class reflects their peripheral status as labourers in, but not of, the social fabric of that class'.<sup>1</sup> Although Wills writes of the 1950s and 1960s, while Hanley's context is of the 1930s, there are direct similarities due to the social marginalisation of the Irish working-class. This is important here because the war in *Our Time is Gone* is shown to be something other than a socially unifying event, unlike images portrayed by British propaganda. Posters, such as the one detailed below (Figure Seven), carried slogans designed to engender a feeling of unification within the entire workforce:



**Figure Seven.**

The words that surround the Union Flag portray a notion of inclusivity and collective solidarity, united in a cause to 'Our' flag. In Patrick MacGill's war writing there is a unifying sense of 'comradeship' between men that, despite their being Irish, allowed them to

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<sup>1</sup> Clair Wills, 'Realism and the Irish Immigrant: Documentary, Fiction and Postwar Irish Labor', p. 376.

hold an ambiguous position in that they did ‘Fight for [the flag]’ while the British army were subjugating Ireland. MacGill, as has been noted, to some extent also distanced himself from British nationalism, in favour of a pan-nationalism emphasising a connection between soldiers, irrespective of nationality, rooted in a shared experience of combat. In Hanley’s novel what is portrayed are Irish men and women who also ‘Work for [the flag]’, in a civilian rather than military context but they are exploited and marginalised due ‘[to] their peripheral status’ in civil society.

The publishing chronology that runs through this thesis permits one to contextualise the experience of men and women on the home front with the activities of soldiers on the battlefield. Thus if one considers the soldiers depicted by Patrick MacGill, James Hanley, and later Liam O’Flaherty, there were simultaneously civilians - merchant seamen such as Dennis Fury and women like his wife Fanny - who carried out work in support of the frontline troops. The notion of understanding such contextualisation generally, and the experiences of Irish working class civilians specifically, both men and women, through an examination of *Our Time is Gone* is significant due to the relative absence of such literary representation elsewhere.

Although the war on land, be that in France or further afield, is recorded in detail from the perspective of officers such as Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves or Edmund Blunden as well as working class Irishmen like Patrick MacGill, Liam O’Flaherty and indeed James Hanley in *The German Prisoner*, the dangers faced at sea during the First World War are, even to this day, less well documented. Adrian Gregory has noted in his *The Last Great War* that German naval tactics were in fact of great concern to the public during the conflict: ‘The indiscriminate use of naval mines, the bombardment of British coastal towns, the emergence of submarine warfare and the beginnings of air bombardment of civilians: they were the central British definitions of “frightfulness”’. Indeed Gregory states further that

‘[w]hat was unacceptable was the reckless endangerment, or worse, the deliberate killing, of maritime civilians’.<sup>1</sup> However there is little written that fictionalises such experiences.

Hanley records, albeit in fictional form, the experiences of working-class men, ‘maritime civilians’, and women who worked in the war effort, but who have largely been overlooked in the prose literature of the conflict - a neglect which leaves the history of the conflict incomplete.

James Hanley’s *Our Time is Gone* is significant in a further sense, one specific to the context of this thesis: it is the only text written of World War One from the perspective of the later global conflict. As Mark Rawlinson stated in ‘The Second World War: British writing’, unlike in the Great War, the latter conflict ‘did not have, nor has it acquired, a hegemonic setting’.<sup>2</sup> Many of those who wrote of the Second World War were civilians: Vera Britten, Stephen Spender and - in a novel written later than *Our Time is Gone* - James Hanley whose work *No Directions* (1943) depicts one night during the London Blitz. The non-military status of such writers stands in relief to those who wrote of the previous global conflict ‘which is still appraised largely in terms of the values and experiences of the combatants’.<sup>3</sup> A reason as to why this wider group of writers should be the case can perhaps be found in the notion of the totalization of the conflict: ‘The cognitive divisions – soldier/civilian, masculine/feminine, overseas/Home Front – that shaped the adversarial character of the most plangent First World War were being eroded [in the Second World War] by technology’.<sup>4</sup> Quite simply from 1939 until the closing days of the war in 1945, everyone was a potential target as civilians came under direct attack, from the bombing of cities in Britain and Germany, to attacks by weapons such as the V1 and V2 rockets.

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 46 and 58.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Rawlinson, ‘The Second World War: British writing’ in *The Cambridge Companion to war writing*, ed. by Kate McLoughlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 197.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 199.

As will become apparent in this chapter, for men and women like Dennis or Fanny Fury the fight is to overcome their own specific wartime conditions, be that attempting to outrun a German submarine or to clean-up the detritus of war. The conflict in *Our Time is Gone* is both a distant and close aspect of life and is context specific: Fanny Fury's contact with a soldier's amputated leg is due to her work but on a day-to-day basis, unlike in the Second World War, the conflict itself remained distant.<sup>1</sup> What *Our Time is Gone* does do is to bring to the reader's attention a little written about aspect of the Great War, the experiences of civilians on the Home Front. The context of that conflict is used, it is suggested, to bring to the civilians of the latter war an understanding of coping, a sense that one can complete one's own personal wartime tasks, regardless of what they may be. In so doing Hanley brings to the fore the notion of war as a common experience, one that was, as mentioned above, far more relevant to the Second, than the First, World War.

### **James Hanley's Portrayal Of Work On The Home Front**

The depiction of work takes varying forms within *Our Time is Gone*. To consider two distinct aspects associated with the home front one has only to look at the Fury family, specifically the son Desmond and his mother, Fanny. In the novel there is one man who owed an allegiance to the working-class, but sought to use them for his own social advancement: Desmond Fury. In the preceding novels, *The Furys* and *The Secret Journey*, Desmond is depicted as progressing from being a Gelton railway labourer, 'hammering wedges into the permanent way', to a union official.<sup>2</sup> Upon the outbreak of war, due to his experience as a trades union official, he is appointed as an army Captain and given the task of 'forming [these] battalions of workers, all massed together [...] to form battalions all over this country, to organize them for the good of this country' (12). Desmond is a man in uniform

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<sup>1</sup> It is recognised that towns on England's east coast came under shellfire from German battleships in 1914 and that Zeppelin raids did take place in London but in the First World War there was not a sustained campaign waged against civilians such as did occur in the Second World War.

<sup>2</sup> James Hanley *Our Time is Gone* (London: The Bodley Head, 1940), p. 22.

whose work is to recruit working class men to the ranks of the army. In his recruitment speech to an assembled group of workers he opens by aligning himself to them: 'I am one of themselves - '(10). Fury's rationale for the formation of such a battalion is predicated, ironically enough for a working class man, upon the idea that '[i]f you should lose [the war] I can well see the material conditions of the people going down, making a common level with the worst of all possible material conditions – the continental level! That is what it might mean. It *would* mean. Enrol tonight' (12). Fury, even though he professes to identify with the workers, is looking to recruit such men because, he believes, if Germany won the war their working practices would impact greatly upon Britain.

What is significant about this character is the manner in which Hanley has amalgamated in one man several of the aspects considered in the thesis: Desmond is working-class, yet because of his previous political position within the trade union, he is appointed as an army officer for recruitment. Fury uses an argument predicated upon a pan-national context, albeit in reverse here. As has been noted in earlier chapters, men such as Patrick MacGill and Gabriel Chevallier espoused the positive aspects of solidarity between working-class soldiers, regardless of nationality. In *Our Time is Gone* Desmond's Fury's task as a working class man is to enlist others of a similar social standing to fight to protect England from what he describes as the scourge of European workers, 'the continental level'. The notion of pan-nationalism is therefore an anathema to this member of the Fury family.

Desmond is viewed by his former working class friends as being what one of them described as a '[b]loody turncoat'. On the same page the following is articulated, ostensibly by the narrator: 'A trade-union man hob-nobbing with the great. Unheard of. Unthinkable' (5). Thus, due to his new position, Desmond has become ostracised by his fellow workers. However, this is not the only group to whom Fury is an outsider. An element of Desmond's social advance was due to his marriage to Sheila Downey, 'outside his [Catholic] religion'

(144) into a wealthy Protestant Anglo-Irish family, the son of whom, John Downey, is a naval officer. Later in the novel Downey and Fury meet with the former, noting: 'you can tell them at a glance. They lacked something' (247). Hanley does not expand upon this idea but the sentiment contained in the words 'them' and 'they' reduces working class men such as Desmond to being socially inferior. Due to his new position Desmond is also ostracised by those he aspires to equal. As such, he is now effectively socially stateless, unable to go back to the workers or advance as an officer.

Significant to this thesis in Hanley's portrayal of Desmond is the extent to which it illustrates Clair Wills' notion of the 'peripheral status' of individuals. Superficially, Desmond Fury's position may seem problematic to a novel whose descriptions serve to reinforce the inability of the Irish working-class in England to advance. However, it is argued, that is the very point of the character Desmond. His ruthless desire for advancement aside, Hanley portrays a society rooted in prejudice, based upon preconceived notions of status wherein ability means nothing: Dennis, Fanny and indeed Desmond are all good at their work, but they remained trapped in a hierarchical system. Even in war when one would assume that all were pulling in the same direction, prejudices based on nationality and class continued to exist despite, as the poster described: 'It's Our Flag, Fight for it, Work for it'.

The second Fury to work on the home front is the novel's matriarch, Fanny. James Hanley is unique in the texts considered here as he is the only writer to portray a female character undertaking work connected to the war. Fanny Fury, like the other subjects of *Our Time is Gone*, is Irish, working-class and Roman Catholic. She is, both in being a civilian not actively engaged directly in the conflict and female, seemingly in an oblique relation to the war. However, she offers a particular perspective that demonstrates important continuities with the other characters, specifically through Hanley's depiction of work. It is recognised that women undertook a myriad of important roles during the First World War, such as the

nursing described by Vera Brittain in her memoir *Testament of Youth* (1933). Yet what is important in the context of this thesis is James Hanley's portrayal of the direct link between the manual labour undertaken by male and female working class workers in remarkably similar locations.

In *Our Time is Gone* Hanley depicts Fanny carrying out war work on a vessel, cleaning a hospital-troopship docked in Gelton; a role that brings her into contact with detritus generated from the conflict. Having been allocated a ship to clean, Fanny's friend, Mrs. Gumbs, states of their employment: 'it's the last job on earth, and the first in hell. It's the lowest of the low' (371). The dual meaning in this statement lies not only in the idea that, due to the awful nature of the work, few would wish to undertake it but also that Fanny Fury must work 'low' down inside the ship, just like Dennis Fury in the stokehold:

Mrs. Fury saw a ladder. Mrs. Gumbs said quite causally, "When you get to the bottom of that ladder, well, you're there" [...] They descended backwards, and with each foot upon the lower rung, the darkness below them seemed to rise and grip them, so that they looked up at the fast-receding light and somewhere beyond it the grey sky. (375-376)

Similarities between working conditions for husband and wife lie in the fact that both are on ships, and each are deep within the vessel. A difference, however, is apparent here in Hanley's description of Fanny's journey. Although she is with others, there is not the sense of workers' unity that will become apparent in relation to Dennis. Fanny begins work 'alone [in] this enormous chamber [...] It was the feeling of isolation in this enormous cavern' (377-378). The connection between Hanley's imagery and that of the aforementioned lyrics of Dominic Behan's 'McAlpine's Fusiliers' is instructive, with navvies 'underneath the Thames in a hole'; or MacGill's *Children of the Dead End*, as labourers are working '[d]own in the cuttings' (236). Likewise in the latter's *Fear!*, the soldiers are in the trenches, '[in] deep holes that opened into the parados' (117). These portray the Irish working class, irrespective



of gender, labouring in subterranean locations, out of sight of society, and existing as, and in, 'the lowest of the low'.

Despite the fact that Fanny Fury is undertaking work in connection with a wartime context, the hospital troopship, there is a gendering of the task she actually carries out, cleaning. In the first novel portraying Fanny's family, *The Furys*, the matriarch is depicted as working within the home. On one occasion in this text, after cooking breakfast for the family, Fanny sends her husband and son out of the house in order that she can begin a 'day's work' of cleaning as 'it was the woman's weekly job'.<sup>1</sup> Fanny 'armed herself with bucket, cloths, soap, and scrubbing brush' before she sets to work on the bedroom floor:

Each scrubbing was a revelation. It revealed more clearly how worn the cloth was, and there was always that thin film of mould between it and the floor. At one time this sheet of oilcloth had been lifted and the wooden floor thoroughly scrubbed; now it was impossible. The oilcloth if lifted would come to pieces. Only its own rot seemed to hold it together. Moreover it was practically glued to the floor. As she scrubbed [the floor] with great circular movements of her right hand, which movements she changed alternately, the circular movements had a peculiar effect upon her. They made her dizzy. Sometimes her hand made sweeping circles long after the desire to scrub had left her, as though through long habit she had become a slave to the rhythm, a rhythm that pulled one to the floor, that held one's knees in a vice-like grip. (305-306)

The act of cleaning is portrayed by Hanley as being very much a 'woman's weekly job', indeed the two men were dispatched from the house in order that Fanny, 'armed' with the appropriate equipment, can do battle with the house, an image prescient, it can be suggested, to the later novel *Our Time is Gone*.

There is evidence in the above passage of James Hanley's inclusion of naturalistic detail. Raymond Williams in his *Modern Tragedy* noted that the difference between realism and naturalism was the latter's:

*mechanical* description of men as the creatures of their environment, which literature recorded as if man and thing were of the same nature. The tragedy of naturalism is the tragedy of passive suffering, and the suffering is passive because man can only endure and never really change his world. The endurance is given no moral or religious valuation; it is wholly mechanical, because both man and his world in what is now

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<sup>1</sup> James Hanley, *The Furys* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 305.

understood as rational explanation, are the products of an impersonal and material process which though it changes through time has no ends. The impulse to describe a condition in which there can be no intervention by God or man, the human act of will being tiny and insignificant within the vast material process, universal or social, which at once determines and is indifferent to human destiny.<sup>1</sup>

In the passage from *The Furies* Fanny is obliged, on a weekly cycle, to repeatedly clean the house, she can ‘only endure’ as she is not in a position to ‘change h[er] world’. Fanny is ‘pulled’ to the floor, an inanimate object that takes hold of her body ‘in a vice-like grip’. Cleaning the floor is a mechanical act to the extent that Fanny becomes a ‘slave’ to the rhythm of the ‘circular movements [the] sweeping circles [that] made her dizzy’. A circle is without end and as such this image, it can be suggested, brings to the reader’s mind the notion of unending repetition, an idea that is reinforced by Hanley’s repetitive use of the word ‘scrubbing’, or as the past tense ‘scrubbed’.

The gendering of Fanny Fury’s wartime work in *Our Time is Gone* is apparent not only in the general idea that she is cleaning the troopship but also specifically apparent in James Hanley’s use of naturalistic detail akin to that of the domestic environment in *The Furies*:

Her head and shoulders suddenly vanished from sight. She was scrubbing under the bunk. The scrubbing ceased. From under the bunk she flung out soiled paper, match-sticks, a mouldy sock, an old envelope, a filthy rag. She scrubbed on. A yellowish light shone down on her [...] She dipped her brush in the bucket and scrubbed. Her right arm moving backwards and forwards, to the right and left [...] Her arm began to ache. It wasn’t like Hatfields. That was nothing. This was scrubbing in the desert, this was scrubbing a world. Scrubbing deep down, scrubbing at the low levels of life, the very bottom. This was cleaning at the dregs of life. She sat back on her heels, surveyed the area she had covered, glanced behind her, and the great deck seemed to lengthen and spread.<sup>2</sup>

One can note similar language: in both environments there is ‘mould’ or items are ‘mouldy’. Hanley’s repeated use of the word ‘scrubbing’ in both texts produces a machine like quality to Fanny’s repetitive actions as though at home she is an ‘automaton’ while below decks in

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p. 69. Emphasis in original text.

<sup>2</sup> James Hanley, *Our Time is Gone*, pp. 377 and 379.

the ship she ceases to be recognisable as a woman, indeed a human, because '[h]er head and shoulders suddenly vanished from sight'. One can assume that it is because she is 'under the bunk' but from whom has she vanished? She is alone in the space but the omniscient narrator continues to describe Fanny's movements, 'she scrubbed on', despite the fact that she has apparently 'vanished'. In both situations Fanny slavishly continues because Hanley portrays her in a gendered role: 'it was the woman's weekly job'.

The noise of the women cleaning the ship, and it is only women, 'sounded like a marching army' (378), a description that highlights how Fanny has replaced one battle with another, war work for the domestic. As Raymond Williams stated in the passage above, 'naturalism is the tragedy of passive suffering' and it is this notion that James Hanley's imagery is conveying because Fanny is suffering in the peacetime house and wartime ship. Fanny's suffering, as portrayed in both *The Furys* and *Our Time is Gone*, is, due to her class, also within a wider social, capitalist, system that both 'determines and is indifferent to [her] human destiny'.

What has been described of Fanny Fury will, as the chapter progresses, be shown to be the case for her husband, Dennis. Fanny Fury is subsumed by the capitalist system that drives her in her a downward social trajectory, one that is mirrored in the description of her physical descent deep into the hospital ship. This is also, as will become apparent, the case for Dennis Fury who, on land, is forced to share the living conditions brought about by his wife's actions, and at sea as he also works deep within the merchant vessel. Both Fanny and Dennis's living conditions on land, and actions at work, illustrate an unalterable condition. To paraphrase Williams' comments detailed above each 'can only endure' as neither is able to 'change [their] worlds'. Through naturalistic detail Hanley, it is argued, reinforces a sense of continuity for these working-class individuals. The war presented an opportunity for many: some industrialists increased their fortunes by turning their factories over to war

production while many women moved from pre-war low-paid work, for example in domestic service, to higher paid, although dangerous, work in munitions factories. Naturalism in Hanley, for this thesis, assists in highlighting how that was not the case for Dennis and Fanny Fury - two Irish Roman Catholic working-class individuals - as there is a clear sense of continuity between their peacetime and wartime work and lives.

It is significant that *Our Time is Gone* portrays Fanny Fury coming into direct contact with the shattered effects of the conflict: no other writer considered in this thesis portrays a civilian encountering such images. As Fanny Fury works, she hears that '[s]omebody on the next deck was shouting. "I've found a leg! Look! I've found a leg!" Mrs. Gumbs got to her feet. "D'you hear that?" She said excitedly. Mrs. Fury got up. Together they went to the end of F deck' (391). This body part, viewed as 'rubbish' (378) to be thrown 'out of the port-hole' (391), links Fanny Fury with the battlefield. Moreover, as the image shares similarities with Patrick MacGill's description of combat in *The Great Push*: 'Men and pieces of men were lying all over the place. A leg, an arm, then again a leg, cut off at the hip. A finely formed leg, the latter gracefully putteed'.<sup>1</sup> Although the style of narration is different between the two authors, in both texts bodies have been reduced to their component parts, objectified; indeed, in the case of James Hanley, becoming rubbish. However, while the women are sufficiently detached from the conflict to find its presence a distraction from their specific tasks, the leg assumes no other significance: the workers perceive it in isolation, divorced from the initial event that resulted in the amputation as they clean the hospital ship in anticipation of 'its next cargo'. (391)

Hanley's portrayal of the body, similar to MacGill, draws out a wider point in relation to identity. On many occasions during the First World War, due to the use of high explosives, bodies were atomised and men could not be given a formal burial, like that of

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push*, p. 38.

Dick Tiltwood in Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*. In Hanley's text, as in MacGill's memoir, the notion of yet another assault on identity is portrayed, as body parts lay strewn on the battlefield or forgotten on the ship. The lack of physicality for a working class man, a situation brought about through a war wound, reduces an individual, in the eyes of others of that same social grouping, to an object.

In so describing the work of women such as Fanny Fury, Hanley brings to the reader's attention an aspect relating to the conflict that is little considered, and certainly not portrayed in any of the other texts being examined in this thesis: who did clean up the debris from war? In this text it is working class Irish women, in an urban environment from which the women have no escape, be that either in their private or working lives.

As has been noted above, Fanny Fury was working in a place out of sight to others. Yet she has also moved to another area of Gelton, described by her husband Dennis, upon his return from a sea voyage, as a process of moving 'Down and not up. Into a hole to hide' (51). Both working and living in areas described as 'down' suggests a degree of anonymity that extends, arguably, to the working class more generally. One learns that Mrs. Fury is cleaning 'a ship that has no name. Washed off so to speak. She has a number' (366). This notion is also apparent in James Hanley's 'Narrative', where the reader is informed: '[t]he S.S. *Corinthian* [...] will cease from this date to bear her usual name and will henceforth be known as transport AO.2 under government orders'.<sup>1</sup> A similar degree of anonymity can be said to apply to working-class soldiers as depicted by Patrick MacGill or Liam O'Flaherty, where men are referred to by their army number, rank and only then by their name. An example representative of all such combatants appears in O'Flaherty's novel *Return of the Brute*: 'No. 8365 Private William Gunn'. While the men are individuals, that idea is tertiary behind a number and rank: officers were referred to by name. Thus men and, in Hanley's

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<sup>1</sup> James Hanley, 'Narrative' in *The Last Voyage and Other Stories* (London: The Harvill Press, 1997), p. 156.

writing, ships, are repurposed for war work; becoming anonymous, with the result being that the vessels lose their identity and spirit, just as ships in wartime are transformed from being in peacetime 'acquiver with life' to becoming 'bleak and hollow-looking'<sup>1</sup> in anticipation of their wartime cargo. However, the work of the sailors on board remains the same, only the nature of what they carry changes from civilian to military.

### **James Hanley's Portrayal of Work at Sea**

In the short story 'Narrative' and *Our Time is Gone*, in part through his depiction of the subterranean employment conditions experienced by the working-class, James Hanley portrays an ambivalence about work. For Hanley it was both an activity that oppressed the working class, but also a source of personal pride. Maugham, a character in 'Narrative', his delirium due to lack of food and water as he floats adrift in the lifeboat following his ship's torpedoing, expresses the following:

If they only wrote a right true history of the war – *that* on Conrad and his tribe bloody masterpieces about Empire written in cabins with carpets and nice fires and more wine there tiger they're alright. What about bloody war in ship's bunkers ship's stokehold. (257)<sup>2</sup>

Maugham articulates two positions: the first is that texts written by Hanley, adopting the perspective of the working-class, present the 'true history of war' by counterbalancing the writings of men such as Joseph Conrad, whose work often portrays middle-class imperial adventurers undertaking activities that brought benefit to the British Empire.

A second idea present in Maugham's account relates to location. Conrad's adventurers inhabit 'cabins' in contrast to Hanley's workers who are in the 'ship's bunkers' - which quite literally become 'bloody' when the merchant ships in both 'Narrative' and *Our Time is Gone* are torpedoed and men killed. Again, the location of the 'ship's bunkers' connects further with the notion of the 'subterranean'. Thus, as in 'Narrative', a new recruit

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<sup>1</sup> James Hanley, 'Narrative', p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> A 'tiger' is an officer's servant.

is told: “Down! That’s your muckin’ place in life. Down! Down! All the bloody time down!”<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the lower down in a ship the dirtier and more physically demanding the job. In *Our Time is Gone*, upon beginning a new shift, Dennis starts on deck where he notes that ‘[the] sea [is] like an enormous carpet, a silent sea’ (572). He then moves increasingly further into the ship: he and the other stokers ‘threaded their way [...] worm-like, down the dizzying and shiny steel ladders [into] the stokehold’ (574). Hanley’s imagery conveys to the reader a sense of distance and depth: the act of threading their way suggests a spiralling motion which, combined with the ‘dizzying’ ladders, reinforces the idea that the men are working at ever greater depths. The depiction of the men as worm-like, as well as underlining the connection between subterranean or submerged workplaces and social subordination, also conveys a sense of the ship as vast, dwarfing the men. This is an impression that is calculated to impress the reader as much as it is to highlight the dehumanisation of the workforce; a common ambivalence in depictions of industrial modernity at this time.

There is also a connection between the ‘worm-like’ merchant sailors, moving to their place of work, and the image of the soldiers marching to the trenches - their ultimate location of labour. In *The German Prisoner*, James Hanley depicts a body of soldiers moving to the frontline and battle:

In that blackness they resembled the rather dim outlines of huge snakes [...] Another order and the men began to nose their way towards the line. One could not say they walked erect, but just that they nosed their way forward [...] The men wormed their way ahead. In that terrible moment when all reason seemed to have surrendered to chaos, men became as it were, welded together. Occasionally one saw a hump back, the outline of a profile, the shadow of legs. A huge eyeless monster that forged its way ahead towards some inevitable destiny. (11-12)

In this imagery, and in the ‘worm-like’ sailors of *Our Time is Gone*, the body of men appear serpentine in nature, denoting a continuous, seamless presence. Such a grouping seems to

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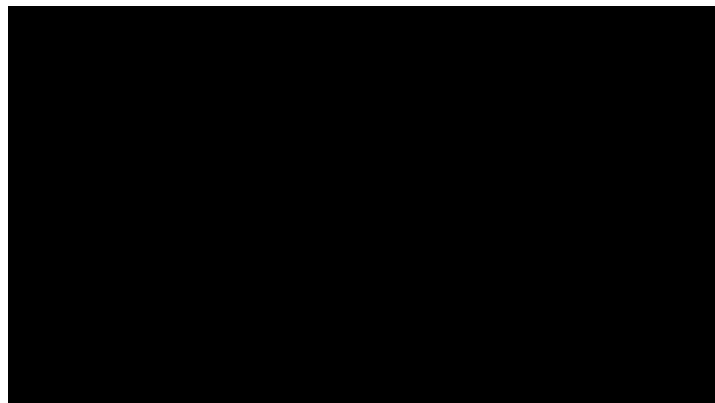
<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 228.

imbue the working-class men with a degree of unity within their environment. However, in each instance Hanley's descriptions heighten the idea that the men are subsumed by the organisation of which they are a part, transforming them into something other than men - 'snakes' or a 'worm', lower down the evolutionary chain - indeed the soldiers are unable to even 'walk erect'.

A description similar to James Hanley's is also present in other working-class war literature, such as in Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*. There, men are depicted marching to the front:

Further on, the mist clears. The heads turn into whole figures – tunics, trousers and boots come out of the mist as if from a pool of milk. They form into a column. The column marches, straight ahead, the figures become a wedge, and you can no longer make out individual men, just this dark wedge, pushing forwards, made even more strange by the heads and rifles bobbing along on the misty lake. A column – not men.<sup>1</sup>

In both extracts working-class soldiers become an undifferentiated mass, either 'welded together' or '[a] column – not men', seamless in appearance. This can be viewed in both a positive and negative light: firstly, a sense of comradeship is exhibited as the men, by common experience, become united. There is also a suggestion of agency, as the men appear to be moving of their own volition. This is similar to the below painting (Figure Eight) by Christopher Nevinson, 'Column on the March'<sup>2</sup> (1915):



**Figure Eight**

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (London: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Nevinson, 'Column on the March', Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, <http://www.bmagic.org.uk/objects/1988> [Accessed 02/05/2017].



It is recognised that this a painting of French *polius* marching to the front, yet it conveys an identical image detailed in the working class texts discussed above. It illustrates the notion of men ‘welded together’ through a common experience; as one’s eye is drawn toward the left, one sees ‘a column – not men’. Conversely, however, that shared event is imposed by the military and strips the soldiers of any individuality, thus reinforcing the notion that the working-class are viewed by many as a homogenous group rather than as unique people.

The officer-writers considered in this thesis also wrote of such events, but in a manner that differed from those of the soldier-writers. A sense of individuality emerges in relation to those in command of the men who are on the march. Both Edmund Blunden and Siegfried Sassoon depict the movement of soldiers; first Blunden and then Sassoon:

The Division is on the move: the roads are alive with tramping men and mules, cars, chargers, ambulances, limbers, lorries and crunching tractors hauling the heavier guns; and the dreamy spires of Bethune catch the splinter-like sun-ray that first pierces the mist [...] hares prick up their ears and watch in wonder, windmill sails perk over the gentle downs just like the listening ears of these shy hares.<sup>1</sup>

On the morning of the Battalion move I made it my business to keep out of the way until the last moment [...] after bolting my breakfast while Flook [Sassoon’s servant] waited to pack the mugs and plates, I left Barton shouting irritably for the Sergeant-Major and wandered away to sit by the river until the whistles began to blow [...] For me it was a luxury to be alone for a few minutes, watching the yellow irises, and the ribbon weeds that swayed like fishes in the dimpling stream [*sic*] [...] I hustled back to the farmyard to find my platoon all present and correct [...] The Battalion moved off at eight o’clock; by twelve it was at Morlancourt.<sup>2</sup>

In both extracts the officers are removed from the group: for Blunden it is the men who are ‘tramping’, while Sassoon takes himself away to the river and omits any details regarding the actual ‘move’. In Remarque’s text the mist revealed ‘[a] column - not men’, while for Blunden it reveals to the author ‘hares’. The officers’ status within the army permits them, it seems, to remain removed from the ‘welded’ mass. To repurpose Remarque they are ‘men’

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Blunden, letter to his mother 1918, in Barry Webb, *Edmund Blunden* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, pp. 59-60.

and not '[the] column' as they stand outside of that group, retaining, through their rank and interest in nature, a sense of individuality.

This notion of separation between officers and men is also apparent in James Hanley's *Our Time is Gone* as the former are high in the ship, unseen, communicating '[by] a ring of bells [with] their brass voices' to the 'stokehold' in which Dennis was a stoker. (577) This system is known as the Engine Order Telegraph and operates by means of a lever which, when moved to a particular position by the officer on the bridge, communicates a task to the engine room that needs to be undertaken.<sup>1</sup> In *Our Time is Gone* there is the order for 'More steam! More power!' (578) The reader is privy to the power dynamic of this unseen authority demanding action in much the same way as Dennis, as is apparent in the short passage below:

"She's a good woman and makes us all ashamed. She believes And I admire her for it."

"More steam! More power!"

The voice roared in, it struck the ear-drums. The trimmers<sup>2</sup> came then. A trimmer stood by. (578)

The first line presents the internal thoughts of Dennis Fury, musing upon his wife Fanny. Then the insistence of the orders strikes 'the' ears, but whose? Who is the narrator observing this phenomena?

In the passage above, working-class men are spoken to by an unseen officer using a mechanical, impersonal method of communication. This serves to reinforce the disparity in their employment, and social, position. The etymology of the term 'stokehold' is believed to be a corruption of the words 'stoke', to feed the fire on a ship, and 'hole', the interior space on a vessel where cargo was stored.<sup>3</sup> Thus one can note that, although more implicit than explicit, a connection can be made between the wartime employment space of a man such as

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Basics of Engine Order Telegraph', <http://www.marineinsight.com/marine-navigation/the-basics-of-engine-order-telegraph> [Accessed 12/09/2016].

<sup>2</sup> A trimmer's job was to move the coal about in the stokehold in order to keep the ship on an even keel.

<sup>3</sup> 'Stokehold', <http://www.oed.com/stokehold> [Accessed 12/09/2016].

Dennis and his home in England, which is 'a hole'. Furthermore this imagery connects Dennis, and Fanny Fury, to the living conditions of the working class men in the trenches, as suggested earlier.

Anthony Burgess's description of Hanley's maritime experiences in the ship's stokehold as being 'the dirty work of manual labour' is conveyed in the extended description of the ship in which Dennis Fury is working as it is being chased by an enemy submarine:

"You'll have to make her go", he said; "make her go."  
The stokehold heard it, smiled to itself. Make her go? Wasn't that their job? In every ship that had ever put to sea, it had been making her go. A fireman went up to Denny Fury.

"Have you heard?"

"Heard what?" asked Mr. Fury [...]

Of course he'd heard. Every trip, every watch. Of course he'd heard. Nothing new. The calm sea, the blue sea shimmering under the sun. But streaked with danger. Everybody knew that. Yet you never gave much thought to it. You were far too busy, too hot, too stifled for breath. You swung open the furnace door and looked into the blaze. You closed it again and heard the quick roar in that burning mouth. And the throb of the steel beyond reminded you. You were in the centre of a world, the world you inhabited in order to make "her go". [...]

Again the other fireman came over, put a hard calloused hand on Mr. Fury's shoulder. "We're being chased," he said and went off again [...]

"More steam! More power."

The voice roared in, it struck his ear-drums. The trimmers came then. A trimmer stood by.

"Why, mister, you look as if you were just going to kneel down and pray on them ashes. We're being chased by a sub."

It went in one ear and out of the other. A submarine chasing them. Damn rot!

"Come here, son," said Mr. Fury and the black-faced lad came over. Dennis Fury put a hand round his neck. "Now I see you haven't been going to sea very long. Why, son, every ship that sails to-day gets chased one time or other. But what does it matter? Now you get more coal, there's a lad. They want more steam, more power. And we're going to give it to them, son" [...]

Every furnace door swung open, fuel was hurled in, the fire roared, the door clanged to. Barrows ran backwards and forwards, the coal was tipped. Up, down; up, down. The shovel swung right, left, up, down. The heat blinded, sweat blinded. The figure in white still cried:

"Make her go".

Make her go. More coal, more steam. More power. Make her go [...] The sound of the explosion was like thunder. (576-579).

This episode contains, it is argued, what Simon Denith refers to in his 'James Hanley's *The Furies*: The Modernist Subject Goes on Strike' as a 'representation of collective life'<sup>1</sup> because it describes the modernist elements in Hanley's first novel of the Fury family. This notion can be transposed onto *Our Time is Gone* because, as in *The Furies*, there is no overarching narrator to guide the reader. Rather, one experiences a sense of the transience and fluidity of the novel's action presented, as it is, through an 'accumulation of subjectivities'.<sup>2</sup>

Hanley avoids relativism in this section of *Our Time is Gone*; he does not portray alternative perspectives through multiple narration. There is no playing off of one perspective against another; rather, the effect is cumulative. What Hanley presents to the reader is a move from consciousness to consciousness, beginning with the personification of the working environment: '[t]he stokehold heard it, smiled to itself'. A brief glimpse of the knowledge held by the 'fireman' leads into 'Denny Fury's' awareness before the reader is presented with a passage in which the consciousness is imprecise: is it Denny's stream of consciousness, or the author's viewpoint; just who is 'you' in sentences such as 'You were far too busy, too hot, too stifled for breath. You swung open the furnace door [...]'? After all, as Anthony Burgess stated: 'Hanley made fiction out of the action he himself had experienced'.

This extract is not untypical of *Our Time is Gone* and portrays the extent to which the novel's narrative describes small events that succeed one another, thereby creating a whole. As Simon Denith argues of *The Furies*, such 'subjectivities appears indeed to be an accumulation without other principle than the slow passage of time'.<sup>3</sup> The frenetic pace of work, reflecting the wartime danger the men faced, is apparent in Hanley's naturalistic detail

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Denith, 'James Hanley's *The Furies*: The Modernist Subject Goes on Strike', *Literature and History* (Vol. 12 No. 1, May 2003), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

reflected in the mechanical, work-like rhythm of the prose: constant repetition of words, short, staccato sentences, together with conjunctions splitting into clauses, is all then cloaked in longer descriptions of processes, conversations or stream-of consciousness passages. The overall effect is to give the impression of speed in what is in fact a slow passage of time. The significance of this for the thesis lies in the extent to which it is similar to that of Patrick MacGill's portrayal of Arthur Ryder's trench raid, during which he bayonets the German soldier. Both authors distort the portrayal of time bringing an idea of the frenetic pace of events during conflict. Yet to the protagonists moments pass as though more slowly reinforcing a sense of horror and unreality experienced in the Great War.

Officer-writers also portray moments of high drama in their novels. Robert Graves describes how, on one occasion, he was in the forward trenches waiting to attack. Graves begins: 'What happened in the front line was this'.<sup>1</sup> This sentence introduces a notion of reportage which is exactly how Graves portrays events, as though separated from the action taking place. Graves uses the third person to depict what occurred; a disastrous release of poison gas by the British, killing their own men. He writes: 'My mouth was dry, my eyes out of focus, and my legs quaking under me. I found a water-bottle full of rum and drank about half a pint; it quieted me and my head remained clear'.<sup>2</sup> Graves, as an officer, has a means of coping with stress not routinely open to those in the ranks; namely alcohol.

Siegfried Sassoon describes his involvement in an engagement in the area of Mametz Wood during the Battle of the Somme. Sassoon attacks a German trench single-handedly, moments after Lance-Corporal Kendle was killed, in an incident discussed earlier:

the bullet had hit him just above the eyes [...] I discarded my tin hat and equipment, slung a bag of bombs across my shoulder [...] While I was running I pulled the safety-pin out of a [hand grenade]; my right hand being loaded, I did the same for my left. I mention this because I was obliged to extract the second safety-pin with my teeth, and the grating sensation reminded me that I was half way across and not so

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye To All That*, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 205.

reckless as when I has started. I was even a little out of breath as I trotted up the opposite slope. Just before I arrived at the top I slowed up and threw my two bombs.<sup>1</sup>

Sassoon's first person narration juxtaposes the 'reckless' act of attacking a German trench alone with physical sensations he was experiencing: the 'grating' of metal on teeth, or being 'a little out of breath'. The author's incredibly brave act is recorded in a matter of fact way, chronologically, with time passing at an ordered rate. What both extracts illustrate is the difference between the working-class writers and the officers whose narratives often record in a rather more dispassionate manner events of high stress.

It is argued that, in Hanley's extract above, the author introduces a further notion of time, a spiritual one. In the anonymous 'trimmer's' comment to Dennis that 'you look as if you were just going to kneel down and pray on them ashes', Hanley locates within the passage a link with Roman Catholic tradition apparent both in the notion of 'pray' and in the presence of 'ashes'. In the Catholic faith, on the feast day of Ash Wednesday, individuals are anointed with ashes on the forehead, in the sign of the Cross, at which time the priest states: 'Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return'. Not only does the trimmer's comment presage the imminent death of many of the men in the 'bloody ship's bunker' when the torpedo strikes but it is also a fragmentary moment in the narrative when Hanley takes the reader, and the men, to a tradition that reflects their Irish heritage, and a wider notion of spirituality. As has been considered in relation to Patrick MacGill's portrayal of a dead Irish Fusilier wearing a rosary, there are moments in the Irish soldier-writer's texts that the narrative is taken out of the moment by a reference to Ireland's cultural heritage. On occasions, MacGill and now Hanley, use Roman Catholicism to reinforce the individual's Irish identity. This is even though each man is actually working in a wartime role on behalf

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<sup>1</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs Of An Infantry Officer*, pp. 90-91.

of the British Empire; a power that, if one considers the wider historical context of the events depicted by both authors, was subjugating Ireland.

The ‘calm [blue]’ sea external to the vessel stands in contrast to the frenetic, dark, internal environment of the engine room, where the manual labour of the men is reflected in the rhythm of the prose: ‘The shovel swung right, left, up, down’. In the action of filling the barrows, inanimate objects take on a human quality, as though of their own volition they ‘ran backwards and forwards’. This is replicated in the insistent drive of the four words ‘up, down; up, down’: the imagery and repeated rhythm provides a sense of unending action. This is then reflected in Hanley’s descriptions of the men’s bodies: ‘You were far too busy, too hot, too stifled for breath [...] The heat blinded, the sweat blinded’. Again, through textual repetition, movement is generated that portrays the notion of men working that produces a response, ‘sweat’, from the body, as the men now seek to feed the voracious furnace whose ‘mouth’ brings to another inanimate object, the ship, an animalistic quality. Again one can note the dehumanising aspect of modernity as, in order to give the ship what it required the men, become ‘mechanical reproductions’. Hanley’s passage hovers between a description of industrial power, as in the modernist spectacle of *Metropolis* or *Modern Times* - in which men’s labour is perfectly choreographed in a mechanistic image - and a different and more threatening image of the hunt, in which the animal-like ship being ‘fed’ is itself prey to another.

The image of the shovel recalls the work of both Patrick MacGill who observed in *The Red Horizon* that ‘[w]ar is waged for the most part with big guns and shovels’<sup>1</sup> and Henri Barbusse in *Under Fire*, referring to soldiers as ‘shovel-bearers’.<sup>2</sup> Although the context is different, land rather than sea, the same implement is being used by working-class men to

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon*, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire*, p. 270.

undertake manual labour, regardless of location and irrespective of nationality. Thus while there is a difference, as outlined earlier, between the war writing of Patrick MacGill and James Hanley, there is, nevertheless a similarity in the type of manual work undertaken by each group: both soldier and merchant sailor use a similar item of equipment. This idea is illustrative of a further continuity between peacetime and wartime work for many such working class men. In the photograph of the Irish railway navvies in the Introduction (Figure Two), one can see men holding either a pick or a shovel.

Further, one can note that for the groups of working class men considered in this thesis their physical effort is elided, and they become one with the function of their implement: for the pre-war navvy and the merchant seaman it is the shovel, while for the soldier, it is the bayonet. The men are metonymically represented by the equipment. As John Fordham argues, the working-class person, through their life experiences, ‘comes to a consciousness of itself - the subject – as object (that is, worker as commodity)’.<sup>1</sup> Thus, as has been seen in the war writing of James Hanley, and of Patrick MacGill - and as will become apparent in relation to Liam O’Flaherty - not only is the working class seaman or soldier considered as an object *per se* in the military hierarchy, they are also portrayed as the object they use: it is ‘*The shovel*’ that swings ‘right, left, up, down’. Just as Dennis becomes objectified, in *Fear!* Private Arthur Ryder is similarly depicted by Patrick MacGill as an object: Ryder, the narrator, states ‘[I am] one of the “bayonets” of this war. A bayonet!’ (279). In this relationship sailor and soldier cease to exist as humans, becoming mere ‘reproductions’ of their equipment.

The extended extract above from *Our Time is Gone* highlights, moreover, one aspect of James Hanley’s ambivalence toward the idea of work. There is encapsulated within it a sense of pride, together with a sense of personal and group identity, which working-class

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<sup>1</sup> John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class*, p. 4.



merchant men often derived from their employment. Fury's comment that 'we're going to give it to them' indicates how the group of men will give to the officers on the ship's deck the speed required to outrun the submarine. A merchant sailor, known as Smith, in Hanley's short story 'Narrative', gives a fuller picture of the pride felt in such work:

all [Royal] naval men were a pack of washerwomen, a gang of old women who did nothing but polish and wash clothes and toe the line [...] To mention the Navy to him was to incur an insult, or a volley of oaths that came spontaneously to his lips, that sprang from some inner part of his being that registered the events, the experiences, the moments and the hours when the Navy had hit hard against the traditional pride he had in the merchant service [this thought] applied to all merchantmen, whose hatred of naval men and methods was a genuine and full-hearted hatred. They hated servility, they hated uniform, they hated old women's work, they hated swank.<sup>1</sup>

Here, disdain for the Royal Navy is based upon the kind of work undertaken by merchant men for whom 'traditional pride' in appearance is to be taken from signs of work, not 'polish'. Brady, in 'Narrative', is depicted as being 'black as pitch from the coal-dust, [and] the sour sweat had lined his face as though it were a human map'.<sup>2</sup> This juxtaposition of blackness and the map also brings colonial connotations to this picture. Dennis, at the beginning of his shift in the engine room, is similarly adorned: he 'mov[ed] into the stokehold that belched acrid fumes into the air [and later] he wiped his face with an already sodden rag' (574 and 577). Similarly, the young man to whom Dennis speaks in the stokehold is, like Brady, 'black-faced' due to the coal. In Hanley's maritime war-writing, the dirt and grime of work is worn predominantly as a symbol of pride. This is reflected in the portrayal of such tasks undertaken by the merchant seaman as hard and dirty, engendering sense of identity within the working-class men. This is in contrast to *The German Prisoner* wherein, as has been noted, dirt becomes associated in a negative manner with his sexual depravity.

One further aspect of the disdain merchant men felt for Royal Navy sailors is the 'servility' displayed by the latter group. Yet men such as Dennis also worked in a

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<sup>1</sup> James Hanley, 'Narrative', pp. 180-181.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 228.

hierarchical organisation, one that is actually portrayed in the extract from *Our Time is Gone*. The officers, situated as they are higher in the vessel, unseen by those in the ‘stokehold’, convey an image of a voice of authority communicating a command to a member of the working-class that, it is argued, is representative of the wider social relationship of owner to worker - and symptomatic of Hanley’s portrayal of ‘internal colonisation’. Unseen forces in society govern the lives of the working-class, through both owners and workers in the city, much as the case on the ship. Yet families such as the Furys live out of sight of the employers, as Hanley describes in the opening of the novel:

Hey’s Alley was one of a series. Such names as Horse Alley, Fox Alley, Pickles’ Alley were neighbours. Looking at them from the river they appeared as a series of funnels. They were dark, stuffy, smelly. Geltonians who never ventured beyond the tall grey warehouses that flanked them, were blissfully ignorant of their existence. A sort of mole-like existence was in being here [they lived] their lives unseen. (46-47)

The warehouses, repositories for goods to be sold at a profit, is owned by employers who are ‘blissfully ignorant’ of the people upon whom they rely for labour. Yet they stand sentinel-like over the workers, who are simultaneously looked down upon but ‘unseen’ as they live a subterranean ‘mole-like’ existence. In Hanley’s text, in both the home and when employed the working class are forced out of sight by a form of colonisation reinforcing a social hierarchy - at the bottom of which are Irish émigrés such as Dennis and Fanny Fury.

In *Our Time is Gone* the men are, as John Fordham argues, ‘perceived as object[s]’ whereby James Hanley transforms ‘workers into automata’.<sup>1</sup> At the behest of the officers men such as Dennis Fury move as though machines, ‘mechanical reproductions’ of the machinery they service. This underscores Hanley’s further ambivalence to work: it engenders identity while being a source of ‘colonise[d]’ oppression. The imagery of Hanley portrays a sense of the futuristic, a form of wireless communication, men like machines, all to outrun what was in the First World War, the ultimate symbol of modernity, the submarine.

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<sup>1</sup> John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class*, p. 4.

## Roman Catholicism and the Conscientious Objector

The violence of war visited upon the soldier whose limb is viewed by Fanny Fury remains unseen, as does the actual moment of impact when the ship in which Dennis is working is torpedoed. What is shown, however, is the aftermath of such an incident, during which Dennis Fury seeks solace, and protection, from Roman Catholicism. This is presented via a religious symbol:

The sound of the explosion was like thunder. It deafened him. The furnace door was blown off, hurled itself into the sea through the enormous hole that the torpedo had made. He was trapped [...] The engines had ceased, but the ship went on trembling, a living thing [...] With finger and thumb he tried to reach the silver medal on his neck. (579-582)

In a moment of crisis Dennis reaches for a religious symbol, 'the silver medal', which one learns earlier in the novel is that of St. Christopher, the patron saint of travellers. The image on such a medal is that of St. Christopher carrying the infant Christ on his shoulders.

Fury's act is illustrative of a motif found in both Patrick MacGill's and James Hanley's war writing: the depiction of religious items for protection. As discussed previously, in *The Red Horizon* a dead Irish Fusilier is portrayed as wearing a 'shiny crucifix'<sup>1</sup> around his neck which, in the context of MacGill's memoir, illustrates a connection between the soldier's religion and his life in rural Ireland. However in MacGill's writing the symbols are ambiguous and, as in relation to the soldier, they prove to be empty for the combatant. They perhaps retain a degree of comfort for the families at home, knowing that an image of the crucified Christ was with the man at his moment of death. For the remainder of Hanley's novel one is not made aware of Dennis's fate; it is only in the next work, *Winter Song* (1950), that one is informed the sailor has survived. Thus while initially the religious symbol can be seen to be empty of meaning, in reality, to those with belief, like Fanny Fury, such a connection to Christ can be viewed as being of help and significance.

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon*, p. 87.

In *Our Time is Gone* there is a further example of an individual who turns to a religious symbol for support. Joseph Kilkey, a conscientious objector, is fifty years of age, an Irish émigré, son-in-law to the Furies, and is depicted working as a stevedore in Gelton docks. Despite the fact that, by age and occupation, he should have been exempt from military service Kilkey receives his call-up papers:

Price Street had emptied itself, half had been killed, two were blind [...] The whole of Gelton seemed to tremble under the terrible energy of work-work-work. And Gelton flung men and more men into the war. Joe Kilkey carried on. He saw thirty of the congregation of Saint Sebastian's go off to France [...] The letter that seemed to have been touched by no human hand but his own fell to the floor. He was called up. There must be some mistake. "Me called up?" It said: "go!" He would go to France, to this war. That was what the letter meant. Who had sent this letter? Who knew about him, where he lived, knew his troubles? Who found him out? Why did they want him? What for? Fight? What for? Who? Germans? He hadn't seen any Germans. (237-238)

The irony apparent in Hanley's choice of street name extends to more than the casualties of the war. The price of the conflict is felt by all such as is apparent in the repetition of the word 'work'. This reflects a rhythm akin to the insistent, thumping reverberation of machinery - mechanisation that itself is assisting the perpetuation of the conflict. The latter, in turn enjoins the workers to send more men to the front and, more than likely, their death. In this passage the reader is presented with an image of individuals being treated without compassion; simply as objects, with the order to join-up produced by 'no human hand'.

Kilkey's confusion upon being conscripted is reflected in the closing lines of the passage. The questions become shorter, portraying a sense of urgency, but they nonetheless remain unanswered. In this passage there is a hint of Kilkey's position as a conscientious objector, since his use of 'What for?' on two occasions is in response to the question 'Fight?' At this early point Kilkey is questioning the notion of war and, in order to find answers Joseph Kilkey, visits his parish priest at Saint Sebastian's, Father Moynihan.

The parish priest is portrayed in James Hanley's novel as a man at the heart of the exiled Irish Catholic community, one to whom individuals such as Joseph Kilkey turn for

guidance and advice. John Belcham, in his *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, has written of this relationship within the Liverpool-Irish community:

[Liverpool was] the capital of Ireland (and of Catholicism) in England [...] Irishness was replenished in Liverpool by the continuing influx of Irish priests, for many of whom the best testimony of fidelity to the faith was commitment to the Irish cause [...] The Catholic parish operated as [a] spiritual and welfare centre.<sup>1</sup>

Belcham states that Catholicism, in the context of the Liverpool-Irish, was not viewed as an ‘alternative identity’ for migrants against Protestant England. Rather, it was ‘an affirmation of their essential Irishness’.<sup>2</sup> By this, it can be suggested, Catholicism became a buffer against ‘internal colonisation’. John Fordham has argued in relation to this idea: ‘Liverpool’s role in establishing an English imperialist hegemony has been to represent to its internally colonised peoples – particularly the Irish – a nationalist process of historical change, which assumes the privileged status of “modern” to depreciate and suppress the significance of other modes of time-consciousness’. In the case of the Irish Catholic migrant, this is viewed as ‘the ‘stasis’ of Irish society, one rooted in a rural economy, which contrasts with what the colonisers perceived as the ‘progress’ of English city life.’<sup>3</sup> In *Our Time is Gone* James Hanley seems to celebrate the notion of ‘stasis’ because it connects to, as Fordham describes, Hanley’s ‘heritage [in] traditional Ireland’.<sup>4</sup> Through Joseph Kilkey’s actions, predicated as they are, in part, upon the Roman Catholic faith, Hanley portrays, but then counteracts, the ‘internal colonisation’ of working-class Irish Roman Catholics via this religious link to ‘traditional Ireland’.

Hanley’s reference to Joseph Kilkey’s parish church as ‘Saint Sebastian’ is, in the context of the novel, an ironic one. Sebastian was, according to mythology, martyred on two occasions: the Roman emperor Diocletian ordered that Sebastian should be executed.

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<sup>1</sup> John Belcham, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool-Irish, 1800-1939* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), pp.14, 18-19 and 92.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>3</sup> John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

Sebastian was tied to a tree, shot with arrows and left for dead but, although injured, Sebastian recovered, only to be beaten to death - again by order of Diocletian. Subsequently Sebastian was canonised by the Roman Catholic Church, ultimately becoming the patron saint of soldiers.<sup>1</sup> The name of the church demonstrates not only the notion of a war culture being ingrained unthinkingly within the community, but it also demonstrates further a complication of the political stance of Catholicism and Ireland to the war.

As discussed earlier in the thesis, the Catholic Church in Ireland, upon the outbreak of war, encouraged the enlistment of Irish men into the British army. The Roman Catholic Church in Liverpool similarly urged men to volunteer. The *Liverpool Catholic Herald*, for instance, ran weekly columns with titles such as 'Irish Soldiers at the Front' and 'Catholics at War'.<sup>2</sup> A Jesuit priest, Father Vaughan, went to Liverpool docks exhorting men: 'Do your duty, and do it now'. Nevertheless, some Irishmen expressed the view that enlistment should be postponed until Home Rule in Ireland was implemented. As John Belchem has argued: 'whole-hearted participation in the war would not only underwrite and guarantee the Home Rule settlement for Ireland; it would also enhance the profile (and improve the lot) of the Liverpool-Irish'.<sup>3</sup> Thus one rationale for the Catholic Church in Liverpool was based upon the idea, as in Ireland, to help Catholic Belgium. Yet there were also the aims of helping those within Ireland to secure independence, together with a degree of employment opportunity for the men and women who had emigrated to England.

In *Our Time is Gone*, however, through the figure of a conscientious objector, James Hanley presents a diametrically opposed position to those described above. Joseph Kilkey explains to Father Moynihan his reasons for not fighting: 'I believe in God and I believe that it's wrong to harm people who haven't harmed you, Father'. (240) As will be noted later in

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<sup>1</sup> [www.catholic.org/saint](http://www.catholic.org/saint) [Accessed 31/05/2014 at 1000 hours].

<sup>2</sup> John Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 251.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

the chapter, Kilkey also advances a socialist argument against the war. Yet here, the reader is presented with a religious viewpoint in the vein of that articulated in Christ's 'Sermon on the Mount'. A religious underpinning of Kilkey's desire not to fight will prove significant later in the novel, through Hanley's presentation of Kilkey's stance as a conscientious objector.

Father Moynihan's advice to Kilkey is to '[a]ct on your conscience [...]' (241), which is what he does - such that he becomes a conscientious objector, a topic not portrayed by any of the other writers considered here. Ford Maddox Ford makes brief mention in his novel *Some Do Not...* (1924): "The son," Tietjens said, "is a conscientious objector. He's on a mine-sweeper. A bluejacket. His idea is that picking up mines is saving life, not taking it".<sup>1</sup> One man who does describe his unwillingness to fight was D.H. Lawrence who, in his quasi-autobiographical novel, *Kangaroo* (1923), devotes his chapter 'The Nightmare' to describing his avoidance of military service during the First World War. However, Lawrence does explain, through the character Richard Lovat Somers, that 'he [Somers] had no conscientious objection to the war. It was the whole spirit of the war, the vast mob-spirit, which he could never acquiesce in'.<sup>2</sup> Throughout this chapter Lawrence castigates those who support the war, using the term 'criminal mob', in various permutations, to describe them.<sup>3</sup> Lawrence further notes that for all those who, like he, refused to fight there existed a 'reign of terror' in England during the war years.<sup>4</sup> What is significant about James Hanley's depiction of Kilkey's treatment at the hands of the authorities, and indeed the public, is that he describes 'the mob-spirit' - in this case members of the Protestant working-class - extended against the men who would not fight.

It is appropriate to note at this point that Joseph Kilkey's desire not to fight was also predicated upon a political stance. In answer to a question asking what would happen if the

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<sup>1</sup> Ford Maddox Ford, *Some Do Not ...* in *Parade's End* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 213.

<sup>2</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (London: William Heinemann, 1964), p. 216.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 253.

Germans won the war, Kilkey replied: ‘Wouldn’t be any worse than some English I’ve seen in my time’ (349). He goes on to elaborate an underlying reason for not wanting to fight, one predicated upon his socialist viewpoint:

“Listen, chums, you’re wrong. It’s not because I’m Irish at all. I’m just like you, and you.” Here he dug his fingers into their chests. “Just the same as you. We’re workers. I’m not clever. Never let on to be – but I’m not much of a mug. And I know workers never got anything out of a war. *You* won’t – and *you* won’t [...] I’m not going. I’m not the only one. Better men than me by a long shot have refused to go. I wouldn’t kill a German for a fortune. They’re as good as you or me” (349).

Kiley’s reason is based upon an internationalist view of the working class: “[we]’re workers”.

This position is further supported by a union official, who states: “I dissociate myself from this magnificent effort of turning the workers into machines, in order to carry on the bloody slaughter of workers of other lands” (339). Both positions counter that of Desmond Fury who, as discussed earlier - despite professing to hold similar views - actually regards the ‘continental level’ of the working class as a reason to fight fellow workers. For working class soldier-writers such as Hanley, especially those who had fought, maintained a realisation, even in the interwar era, that the working class were used to fight against men of a similar worldview, but just happened to be wearing a different uniform.

Like MacGill in *Fear!*, Gabriel Chevallier’s novel of the same name also makes a wider connection between soldiers of different nationalities, including the enemy, based upon class: ‘we are all proletarians of duty and honour, miners who labour in competitive pits, but above all miners, with the same pay and risking the same explosions of firedamp’.<sup>1</sup> Erich Maria Remarque also identifies the soldier in the ranks with those of his enemy; a position exemplified in a conversation between Privates Katczinsky and Tjaden: ‘we are almost all ordinary people, aren’t we? And in France the majority are workers, too, or tradesmen or clerks. Why on earth should a French locksmith or a French shoemaker want to attack us?’

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Chevallier, *Fear*, p. 240.



No, it's just the governments'.<sup>1</sup> All four aforementioned writers, as has been seen, espouse an international socialism that equates combat with work, but James Hanley is unique. In *Our Time is Gone* Hanley also explores this stance in relation to non-combatants who extend their pan-national solidarity to German soldiers and citizens alike insofar as they are fellow workers.

Hanley's depiction of Kilkey being led to the army barracks having, been arrested by military policemen for ignoring his call-up letter, can be viewed as a re-working of Christ's journey to Calvary which is, as has been discussed, paralleled by Hanley's re-working of the crucifixion in *The German Prisoner*. Having been woken in the early morning by the soldiers, Kilkey:

took from the top-drawer a pair of brown scapulars. These he used only in attendance at the monthly service for the members of the Third Order of Saint Francis. He put them round his neck, then buttoned up his shirt. Always he carried inside his vest pocket a small medal of Saint Christopher, but now as he heard the hammering on the door he seemed to realise that he would want the help of more than one saint that day. (446).

The significance of scapulars is explained in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia of 1914*, where it states that: '[l]ike the Rosary, the Brown scapular has become the badge of the devout Catholic'.<sup>2</sup> By Kilkey wearing such an object it can be suggested that he shares a common heritage with the dead Irish soldier depicted wearing a rosary in Patrick MacGill's *The Great Push*, alongside Dennis Fury and his St. Christopher. What is significant about all these instances is the notion that there is a link to Catholicism, and to Ireland: the men seek intercession from their God through physical contact with a religious symbol and, as has been discussed with regard to Father Moynihan, religion then makes that direct link to their 'home', both in England and Ireland. It is argued here that this gives Joseph Kilkey a sense of an Irish identity, which allows him to resist the notions of duty and support for the British

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Scapular', [www.catholicity.com/encyclopedia/s/scapular](http://www.catholicity.com/encyclopedia/s/scapular) [Accessed 9 June 2014].

Empire, promulgated at the time as reasons why a man such as he should be conscripted and sent to the trenches.

It is interesting that, despite Irish soldiers being encouraged and, in the case of those resident in Britain, conscripted to fight for the British, their ambiguous status with respect to national feeling is noted within the army. This is overt among the larger community depicted in Hanley's novel, such as with the actions of one of the soldiers detaining Kilkey:

He noticed the brown cord, round the man's neck and putting his fingers underneath quickly zipped the scapulars into view. "Where I come from," he said, giving a pull on the cord, "we hang bastards like you on their scap-u-lars," and he sang the last word into Joseph Kilkey's face. "Good old Belfast, mate!" (446-447)

This is the first of several sectarian comments aimed at Kilkey highlighting the animosity directed toward Catholic, Irish émigrés within England - even within their working-class community - and connects with Barrera's notion of 'internal colonization' by supporters of the 'English imperialist hegemony'. At this time, anyone who did not explicitly identify with British nationalism was isolated, placed on the 'periphery' of society.

In the passage above the vitriol is pointed at Kilkey, an individual, but his vilification also reflects a larger social phenomenon at this time. As John Belchem noted, during the First World War 'Liverpool-Irish were [themselves] viewed with increasing suspicion' by non-Catholics.<sup>1</sup> This view is articulated by Hanley in his novel:

The neighbours knew all about [Kilkey]. In fact some of them, never too friendly, were now wondering why this "big strong feller" wasn't doing his bit for King and country. The inhabitants of Price Street who annually honoured the memory of Prince William of Orange took the worst possible view. He was Irish. That was enough for them. "Dirty lot of bastards". That's what they were. Stabbing England in the back already. Hadn't they tried to do the dirty in Ireland? You couldn't trust them [...] Mr. Kilkey might well be connected with those "murdering bastards" in Ireland [...] The Irish were like that, anyhow (101).

This passage highlights a sectarian divide between loyalists, supporters of 'William of Orange' and 'The Irish'; men such as Catholic Kilkey. A passage like this also draws the

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<sup>1</sup> John Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse*, p. 256.

reader's attention to Britain's imperialism. To fight 'for King and country' implies a strong connection of the 'inhabitants of Price Street' with the Empire. As discussed in Chapter One, such sentiments were scored through in the letter Patrick MacGill sent to Canon John Dalton, thereby perhaps illustrating MacGill's distain for the British Empire. Yet, as a soldier, the Irishman continued to '[do] his bit'. In Hanley's novel, however, a moral objection to the war is raised.

Hanley's use of the phrase 'murdering bastards' in the extract above clearly refers to Irish unrest, and specifically the Easter Rising of 1916. Hanley's narrative actually provides the reader with the clue to such an idea: the Easter Rising began on 29 April 1916, while conscription of both single and married men was passed into law on 25 May 1916.<sup>1</sup> Thus sectarian divisions manifest themselves simply because a Catholic Irishman refused to fight, regardless of the motivation for such a stance.

It has been stated that Kilkey's treatment at the hands of the soldiers is a version of Christ's journey to Calvary. This begins as he collects personal belongings from his home when a soldier tells him: "We always dress you fellows up" (447). In St. Mark's Gospel the following passage occurs: 'The soldiers led him away [...] and dressed him up in purple'.<sup>2</sup> As Kilkey is led outside, '[a] crowd collected' from which a women emerged: '[s]he went right up to Mr. Kilkey and spat in his face. "Coward [...] Dirty shirker! Rather fight for the Pope, you would"' (448). Again, a degree of sectarian hatred is exhibited in an act that chimes with St. Mathew's Gospel, where it is recorded that 'they spat on him [Jesus]'.<sup>3</sup>

As Kilkey is taken down the road, the soldiers ensured they had a secure grip of him: 'Not only was the hold on neck and wrist maintained, but one held his right arm, and wrist, another the left' (449). The image Hanley presents to the reader is of Kilkey being held in

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (London: Cassell, 2003), p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Gospel of St. Mark, 15:16, *Jerusalem Bible* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd).

<sup>3</sup> Gospel of St. Mathew, 27:30, *Jerusalem Bible*.

the shape of a cross. The watching crowd were in ‘an ocean of patriotism’ (449) and, as the group becomes more aggressive toward the Irishman, a woman ‘[w]ith a few quick movements of her hands had turned the newspaper into a hat. As Joseph Kilkey came by, this improvised soldier’s hat was jammed on his head’ (449). This act again resonates with the biblical description of Christ’s journey to Calvary, such as one finds in St. Mathew’s Gospel: ‘[...] having twisted some thorns into a crown they put this on his head’.<sup>1</sup>

Kilkey, by his actions, has become an outcast within his own community. No one in the crowd stopped to help him: ‘Joseph Kilkey passed through the neighbourhood that had known him for over twenty years, and he passed through it as a complete stranger’ (450). The war magnified national and political divisions within communities, reflecting both the composite nature of the British army and the provisional nature of the integration of Irish emigrants in Britain. The authorities needed men, regardless of background; yet Kilkey, although castigated as a contentious objector is also vilified along sectarian grounds. The Irish Catholic émigrés are portrayed in Hanley’s novel as a colonised group - even by individuals from their home country - because the stance taken by men such as Kilkey counters the prevailing view that connects Protestantism with support for England: Catholics could be considered to be ‘stabbing [Britain] in the back’.

It is appropriate to note at this point that there was also a confessional divide within imperial Germany, a religious schism akin to that described by James Hanley in *Our Time is Gone*. In broad terms Germany was, like Britain, divided between Protestant and Catholics. As Mathew Jeffries stated in his *Imperial Culture in Germany* both religions ‘regarded each other with mutual suspicion, and often outright hostility’.<sup>2</sup> A further similarity between the two countries lay in the fact that Germany’s bourgeois culture was predominantly Protestant

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 27:29.

<sup>2</sup> Mathew Jeffries, *Imperial Culture in Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 14.

while Catholicism ‘embraced many industrial workers’, some of whom were ‘working-class’.<sup>1</sup> As described in the Introduction, the Catholic Revival in Britain - brought about in part due to the influx of Irish migrants - resulted in the profile of the Catholic Church shifting to being predominantly working-class.

Unlike in Britain, however, the confessional divide within Germany split the country geographically. As James Retallack stated in his *Imperial Germany 1871-1918* the ‘social geography of the German states’ as Catholics and Protestants were ‘concentrated in specific regions’.<sup>2</sup> This is a different position to that portrayed by James Hanley in *Our Time is Gone* wherein the sectarian divide, as illustrated by ‘Price Street’, was on a much closer, personal level.

This notion of proximity between religions is further evidence in *Our Time is Gone* through one last sectarian attack: ‘a remarkably pretty girl no more than eighteen ran up to Mr. Kilkey and a stream of abuse and oaths issued from her lips. She scratched her hand down one side of his face [...] she watched a tiny trickle of blood run down the man’s cheek’ (451-452). This act is akin to the depiction in St. Mathew’s Gospel of Jesus having been ‘scourged’.<sup>3</sup> This is a word that, as discussed in earlier chapters, is used by Patrick MacGill in his poem ‘A Soldier’s Prayer’ in referencing a ‘shrapnel-scourged’ Christ on a Cross. In *Our Time is Gone*, Joseph Kilkey, the Irish stevedore is not ‘mute’ - as is MacGill’s Christ - because he defies public, military and legal opinion by making himself a target of abuse. In this sense, Hanley’s text transfers any notion of redemption from the figure of Christ to that of individuals with principles; men such as Joseph Kilkey.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> James Retallack, *Imperial Germany 1871-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 27:27.

## Conclusion

As has emerged in this chapter James Hanley, in his novel *Our Time is Gone*, was highly critical of the prosecution of the First World War but, uniquely for this thesis, from the standpoint of a civilian perspective and further, a female civilian point of view. Not only did he speak out against the patriotism promulgated by the government, and taken up almost uniformly in Britain. What Hanley's novel illustrates is a fragmentation of society as individuals view the conflict from entrenched social positions; in the case of Ireland, primarily rooted in one's religious belief - be that Protestant or Roman Catholic. One manner in which the conflict directly entered the lives of individuals on the home front was through manual work in which they were employed. Yet the war was not necessarily a unifying cause, as *Our Time is Gone* sheds light on sectarian divides among working class Irish émigré communities within England.

Wartime events in Ireland, in particular the Easter Rising of 1916 - but also the extent to which Catholic sections of the country were less favourable to fighting on behalf of the British Empire than those who were Protestant - spilled out onto the streets of Hanley's fictionalised Liverpool. Against this backdrop of communal antagonism and violence military aggression manifested itself against another group of civilians, not on land but sea, as experienced by Irish working class men in the British merchant navy.

James Hanley's *Our Time is Gone* portrays arenas of the war not considered by any of the other writers examined in this thesis. In so doing, this text adds to the body of First World War writing in a unique and meaningful manner. In the next chapter, Liam O'Flaherty's short story 'The Alien Skull' and his novel *Return of the Brute* will be examined, as both portray, in disturbing ways, violence and death on the Western Front.

## Chapter Five: 'A study of evil': Liam O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute*

### Introduction

James Hanley's novel, *Our Time is Gone*, as has been considered, depicted two underrepresented areas of the First World War: the home front and service within the merchant navy. In so doing Hanley portrayed in his writing the wide-ranging connections Irish, working-class, Roman Catholic men and women had with the conflict. The focus of the narratives to be considered in this chapter, Liam O'Flaherty's short story 'The Alien Skull' and his novel *Return of the Brute*, returns to the wartime trenches of France and, in so doing, provides a context for an examination in the final chapter of the homecoming to Ireland of an Irishman who served in the British army; namely, Fergus O'Connor in O'Flaherty's *The Black Soul*.

The *Return of the Brute* portrays the experiences of a section of nine working-class soldiers advancing through No Man's Land toward an enemy who remains at all times unseen. All but one of the men are killed. In this text O'Flaherty depicts the onset of war-induced trauma suffered during combat by Private William Gunn; a condition that is then portrayed in *The Black Soul*, but within an interwar environment. 'The Alien Skull' describes a meeting in No Man's Land of two soldiers, one British and the other German. During the encounter the men form a fleeting friendship. Yet the Entente combatant, Private Mulhall, shoots dead his opponent before he too is shot.

It is possible that O'Flaherty's short story is, to a degree at least, autobiographical. A.A. Kelly, the editor of *The Letters of Liam O'Flaherty*, reported how the author had revealed to her that 'The Alien Skull' was 'based on [O'Flaherty] meeting a German in No Man's Land between the trenches'.<sup>1</sup> The extent to which any of the fictional texts by the Irish soldier-writers are based upon direct experience is conjecture but, as with James

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<sup>1</sup> A.A. Kelly in *The Letters of Liam O'Flaherty*, ed. by A.A. Kelly (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1996) p. 438.

Hanley's *The German Prisoner*, given the degree of violence portrayed - especially when compared to the officer's texts, for example, - the possible blurring between fact and fiction becomes tantalising as it poses seemingly unanswerable questions to the reader regarding the authors' actual wartime experiences. Importantly, each of the three Irish soldier-writers appear to attribute significant personal experience to their writing: O'Flaherty, as discussed above. James Hanley was said to have 'made fiction out of the action he himself experienced' while Patrick MacGill stated of '[t]he guilty secrecy of war [...] to know it you must be one of those who wage it, a party to dark and mysterious orgies of carnage'<sup>1</sup>. This chapter will build upon a previous discussion of how Patrick MacGill and James Hanley depicted moments in their texts in which combatants are described as feeling a degree of pleasure in the act of killing. This suggestion is also present in Liam O'Flaherty's 'The Alien Skull', and thus leads to a question that cannot be answered: did the Irish soldier-writers ever similarly feel such elation?

### **Liam O'Flaherty's Early Life**

Liam O'Flaherty was born on 28 August 1896 in the village of Gort na gCapall, 'The Field of the Horses', on Inishmore, on the Aran Islands, off County Mayo on Ireland's West coast. O'Flaherty described, in his autobiography *Shame the Devil* (1984), how his childhood was one of 'extreme poverty'.<sup>2</sup> Patrick Sheeran, in his *The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty*, goes further. He describes the village in which O'Flaherty was born as a 'rural slum [where] poverty, famine and death were everyday facts of life'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed Sheeran's research has revealed that, within such an environment, Liam O'Flaherty's family 'was one of the poorest

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Burgess, 'Introduction' in James Hanley's *Boy*, p.ii. and Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push*, 'Foreword'.

<sup>2</sup> Liam O'Flaherty, *Shame the Devil* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1984), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Sheeran, *The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1976), pp. 14-15.



of the poor'.<sup>1</sup> O'Flaherty, as such, shares with both Patrick MacGill and James Hanley a common working-class upbringing in which survival was a constant struggle.

Liam O'Flaherty's home was a less comforting one than that of either Patrick MacGill or James Hanley, located as it was in a harsh, wild environment. Indeed John Millington Synge, who visited the Aran Islands between 1898 and 1901, describes how the land mass formed a 'universe that wars with wind and seas', engendering within Synge 'a strange sense of exile and desolation'.<sup>2</sup> It can be suggested that perhaps O'Flaherty's descriptions of the wilderness of the wartime battlefields and the brutality revealed in combat betrayed some similarities with the discourse of primitivism in his own landscape, which was presented as a kind of enemy. O'Flaherty's depiction of the Aran Islands are as far from James Hanley's brief description of the urban filth of Dublin in *The German Prisoner* as they are from the rural idyll presented by Patrick MacGill. In conjunction with his writing on the war, however, O'Flaherty's conventional portrayal of the rugged West of Ireland can be read more antagonistically, suggesting an ambivalence about home only exacerbated by the uneasy status of the returning soldier in the author's life and fiction.

In 1908 O'Flaherty was sent from Aran to Rockwell College, Cashel, County Tipperary, in order to train as a Roman Catholic priest. He left soon afterwards, explaining his decision retrospectively with the flippant but hostile comment that '[he] did not want to suffer the humiliation of wearing a priest's womanly rig'.<sup>3</sup> O'Flaherty advances an idea of masculinity at odds with Catholic practices, unlike the officer-writers whose ideas of manliness drew upon a Protestant notion of 'muscular Christianity' to which they had been exposed in their public school education.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> J. M. Synge, *The Aran Islands* (London: Read Books, 2013), pp.49 and 45.

<sup>3</sup> Liam O'Flaherty, *Shame the Devil*, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Moore-Bick, *Playing the Game: The British Junior Officer on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Solihull: Helion and Company, 2011), p. 22.

Despite O’Flaherty’s obvious anti-Clerical views, he continued his education at religious institutions attending Belvedere College and then Blackrock College, County Dublin, between 1913 and September 1914. He then reached the decision to leave: ‘I danced on my soutane, kicked my silk hat to pieces, spat on my religious books, made a fig at the whole rigmarole of Christianity and left that crazy den of superstitious ignorance’.<sup>1</sup> O’Flaherty was more overtly hostile to religion than either Patrick MacGill or James Hanley. Yet at the same time he was shaped by it, a fact that, as will become apparent in the following chapter, emerges in O’Flaherty’s novel, *The Black Soul*.

In 1915, following a period at University College, Dublin, Liam O’Flaherty enlisted in the British army, joining the Irish Guards, but not under his own name: he served as Private William Ganly, the surname an alteration of his mother’s maiden name of Ganley. There seems to be no extant documentary evidence to explain the reason why, as an Irishman, he volunteered - or indeed for his change in name - but the latter may have been to distance himself from the distrust many in Ireland felt toward those who enlisted. O’Flaherty expressed the view that his serving with the British ‘was a far greater blow to my relatives than my refusal to become a priest’.<sup>2</sup> Liam O’Flaherty served with the Irish Guards in France until 1917, when he was wounded and subsequently medically discharged due to injuries sustained from an explosion. Although the physical war wound healed, O’Flaherty suffered psychologically for the rest of his life. This is important in relation to both *Return of the Brute* and *The Black Soul*, as both portray men afflicted by war-induced trauma.

Upon leaving the British army O’Flaherty, as described in an ‘Introduction’ to the anthology *The Best Short Stories of 1926*, he ‘[s]et out to conquer the world’. He was initially employed as a merchant seaman traveling between South America and Liverpool,

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<sup>1</sup> Liam O’Flaherty, *Shame the Devil*, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

before working in North America and Europe at a variety of jobs, such as ‘lumberjack, railway worker, tinned milk maker, miner in coppermines, dock labourer [and] hobo carpenter’.<sup>1</sup> While the author may not have conquered the world, O’Flaherty did gain a political sensibility alongside an insight into the difficulties experienced by working people. In later years, this informed his writing generally and, as will become apparent in the context of this thesis, his war texts in particular.

Liam O’Flaherty returned to Ireland in 1921 becoming, as he described in *Shame the Devil*:

active in various manners, to wit, in the organisation of the unemployed and the seizure of the Rotunda, over which [we] hoisted the Red Flag, and fed the poor, in participation in the Four Courts Rebellion and [then] going once more to London, where, in September 1922, [I] commenced to write.<sup>2</sup>

As suggested by the image of ‘the Red Flag’, O’Flaherty was involved with Communism to the extent that James O’Brien, in his *Liam O’Flaherty*, observed how it was, for several years, ‘[O’Flaherty’s] second faith’.<sup>3</sup> Yet ultimately O’Flaherty realised: ‘I was unfitted to be the adherent of any political creed and that I could not believe in God’.<sup>4</sup> O’Flaherty’s political involvement is evidence of the extent to which his views on politics and religion were subject to change. This, as will become apparent, is reflected in his war writing: he fought for the British army, yet risked his life for Irish nationalism being, on the one hand, as he described, ‘at home, in [my] own village, among [my] own people’.<sup>5</sup> Yet on the other, as A.A. Kelly has suggested, O’Flaherty also ‘[had] an admiration for the long-gone Great Britain of the twenties, especially London’.<sup>6</sup> Liam O’Flaherty’s relationship to both Britain and Ireland was deeply ambivalent, as will become apparent here and in the next chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Liam O’Flaherty, ‘Introduction’ in *The Best Short Stories of 1926* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927).

<sup>2</sup> Liam O’Flaherty, *Shame the Devil*, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> James H. O’Brien, *Liam O’Flaherty* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1973), p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Liam O’Flaherty, *Shame the Devil*, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.66.

<sup>6</sup> A.A. Kelly, *The Letters of Liam O’Flaherty*, p. 438.

As alluded to in an early chapter, by 1922 O'Flaherty had become a member of 'a small group' of writers who had 'chance, infrequent meetings [at] the Progressive Bookshop at 68 Red Lion Street, Holborn'. The premises was owned by Charles and Esther Lahr and frequented, among others, by James Hanley.<sup>1</sup> Indeed Hanley and O'Flaherty were due to collaborate as the latter, 'Hanley's [literary] favourite', was to provide the 'Preface' to a 'volume of [Hanley's] stories' but, for reasons that cannot be explained, 'the stories disappeared'.<sup>2</sup> Due to a lack of documentary evidence it is supposition to consider why Hanley held O'Flaherty in such high regard. Nevertheless, both men wrote of similar subject matter: O'Flaherty's 'The Fireman's Death' closely resembles Hanley's 'The Last Voyage', for example, as each text portrays elderly stokers who work themselves to death on board merchant vessels. Both writers also depicted working class men, and women, who were exploited by systems over which they exerted no control, a condition replicated in their war writing.

### **Irish Landscape And The Battlefield**

As previously argued of both Patrick MacGill and James Hanley, Liam O'Flaherty's involvement with the war was also not for reasons of patriotism, or through any affinity with the British Empire. None of the men expressed any known sympathies with British Imperialism, indeed Patrick MacGill, as has been shown, presented sentiments in his novel *Fear!* that presented the war as being prosecuted for colonial reasons. Liam O'Flaherty did derive a sense of pride based not upon what he did for Britain, but upon his membership of a particular regiment, as A.A. Kelly has noted: 'He was proud of having been in the Irish Guards, but he would not talk of the Somme, as he was sickened by it'.<sup>3</sup> As with Patrick MacGill's regiment, the London Irish Rifles, the Irish Guards were successful in creating an

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<sup>1</sup> John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class*, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.102.

<sup>3</sup> A.A. Kelly, *The Letters of Liam O'Flaherty*, p. 438.

Irish identity within the British army, despite its contradictions: the cap badge worn in the First World War was in the shape of the Star of the Order of Saint Patrick.<sup>1</sup> (Figure Nine) This was an order founded in 1783 and awarded to those in Ireland who were in ‘high office and Irish peers on whom the government of the day depended’.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure Nine**

Inside the star is a three leaf clover, a symbol explained in the Gospel of Mathew as ‘the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’.<sup>3</sup> Fresh shamrock, a further symbol used by Ireland’s Patron Saint to explain the Holy Trinity was, during the First World War - and is still to this day - handed out to all Irish Guards personnel on Saint Patrick’s Day, regardless of where in the world they are serving.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it can be suggested that men such as Liam O’Flaherty and Patrick MacGill, although wearing on their military caps a symbol with links to the British Crown, also went to war carrying insignia imbued with Irish cultural, social and mythological significance, which clearly assisted in maintaining an identification with their country of birth. This does not explain why O’Flaherty enlisted in the first place but it does suggest why, following the cessation of hostilities, he may have felt a degree of loyalty to this notionally Irish entity.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Irish Guards Cap Badge’, [www.britishmilitarybadges.co.uk](http://www.britishmilitarybadges.co.uk) [Accessed 06/03/2017].

<sup>2</sup> ‘The Order of Saint Patrick’, [www.doyle.com.au](http://www.doyle.com.au) [Accessed 10/04/2017].

<sup>3</sup> Gospel of Mathew, 28: 18-20, *Jerusalem Bible*.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Shamrock and the Irish Guards’, [www.irishcentral.com](http://www.irishcentral.com) [Accessed 10/04/2017].

As will become apparent, unlike in *The Black Soul* which is set solely on a small island off Ireland's west coast, both 'The Alien Skull' and *Return of the Brute* make no direct reference to the author's country of birth. Each text, however, as will be argued, is connected to Ireland through the names of working-class characters and, in the case of the novel, through descriptions of the landscape. As such, there is a link between the war writing and the natural environment O'Flaherty experienced during his childhood on the Aran islands.

Depictions of the Irish landscape constitute an oblique allusion via Liam O'Flaherty's portrayal of No Man's Land. This is apparent in *Return of the Brute* in relation to the author's description of the wartime landscape, not least due to the repetition of certain imagery:

From the pitch-dark sky the rain fell, unceasing and monotonous, like the droning of brine water falling on a floor of black rocks from the roof of a subterranean cave where moaning seals are hidden and flap about upon their ledges; sounds from a dead world; the mysterious gloom of the primeval earth, where no life had yet risen; no sap of growing things; nothing but worms and rats feeding on death; Clods of dislodged mud slipped from the sides of holes, flopped into blood-stained pools, sank and turned into slime [...]

[Gunn] closed his eyes and saw a dark cave in which a man was prowling about with a club. Afar off, somewhere in the cave, seals were moaning and flopping about on rocks and tumbling into unseen pools, while, from the roof of the cave, brine water fell with a droning sound on slippery rocks. He opened his eyes and shrugged himself. He heard the moaning of his comrades and the droning of the rain [...] He heard the flopping sound of feet moving about in water.<sup>1</sup>

Superficially, the attention paid to the natural imagery - and the seals in particular - may seem puzzling in the context of a war novel. However, it can be suggested that there are broad similarities between this depiction of the battlefield and John Millington Synge's descriptions in his *The Aran Islands* of O'Flaherty's home. Synge, as mentioned earlier, describes how the people of the Aran Islands lived in 'a universe that wars on them with winds and seas'. Yet at other times he variously describes the landmass as 'dreary [and] desolate', while at

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<sup>1</sup> Liam O'Flaherty, *Return of the Brute* (London: The Mandrake Press, 1929), pp. 22-23 and 70-71.

others there is 'a wild shower of rain with the wind howling', and there is generally 'a strange wildness'.<sup>1</sup> Synge later noted how he saw 'a curious cave hidden among the cliffs, a short distance from the sea'; while he also notes that 'night had fallen and the hurricane was howling over the Dun' - in addition to which he described how 'two seals [that] were chasing each other'.<sup>2</sup> It is recognised that such descriptions could be applied to many locations, however, what is intertextually significant for this thesis is that they apply to the place of O'Flaherty's birth and cumulatively conjure to one's mind a 'primeval' landscape that find similarities with the author's portrayal of a First World War battlefield.

O'Flaherty's imagery is incongruous in the extracts above, particularly given the context in which they appear. There is present in both passages a suggestion of formlessness: the mud that 'flopped' and is tainted by 'blood' becomes 'slime'; a substance that can variously be described as glutinous or viscous but is both suggestive of matter without form, and which can constitute the landscape of a battlefield. It can be suggested that No Man's Land was also without form because of its amorphousness. The trenches were highly organised: a routine governed the working of these areas twenty four hours a day. Once one entered No Man's Land, as stressed in the texts of Patrick MacGill and James Hanley, that sense of order dissipated, and one could act without restriction; indeed, to survive in an attack that was a necessary element. In *Return of the Brute*, Liam O'Flaherty is taking that notion of formlessness further by extending it to the very substance that made up the environment, thus making the liminal space between trenches itself an enemy.

Liam O'Flaherty's use of imagery like the 'seals' is significant in a number of different ways: firstly, seals, it can be suggested, can be viewed as taking different forms. They can be regarded as being an early stage of human development, imbued as they are with

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<sup>1</sup> J. M. Synge, *The Aran Islands*, pp. 7, 107 and 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 145-146, 171 and 176.

the ability to live in and out of water, in addition to which they possess primitive anthropological communication skills, as they are ‘moaning’. There is a further significant point that can be considered in relation to the seals, one that connects with O’Flaherty’s heritage. In Irish mythology, as Patricia Monaghan describes in her *Celtic Mythology and Folklore*: seals were imbued with human qualities. For instance, they were viewed as ‘enchanted people (sometimes, fallen angels) [...] Some scholars remark upon the claim of seal ancestry by certain coastal families in Ireland, the Coneelys, Flahertys, MacNamaras, Sullivans and many families on Achill island’. Monaghan adds further that ‘seals do bear some resemblance to human beings, especially in their moaning calls [while] in Donegal [it] was believed that seals were human beings wearing fur coats’.<sup>1</sup>

Liam O’Flaherty wrote extensively in Gaelic and, as a member of a ‘coastal’ family, it is possible that he was aware of such mythology. Thus the imagery of the seals assumes a further significance here. The landscape of Ireland and France impose themselves upon one another, but not in a comforting way. The formlessness of the battlefield, the men ‘living in a lonely hole in No Man’s Land, where a dark sky, sodden, naked earth and a curtain of rain constituted their world [in] pitch darkness [lost] in No Man’s Land, floundering in the mud, while the ceaseless rain fell upon them with a monotonous drone. Mud, rain, darkness’ (41, 64) is mirrored by the ‘dreary [and] desolate’ and ‘[the] strange wildness’ of Ireland’s west coast, a place inhabited by seals whose presence in the frontline draws one into an Irish mythological past that, in *Return of the Brute*, signals a sully of O’Flaherty’s relationship to his country of birth.

This also connects with what is natural in this novel; an aspect that is unstable in O’Flaherty’s writing in a manner different from Patrick MacGill or James Hanley. The untamed nature in this novel is in contrast to the idealised, domesticated rural landscape in

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Monaghan, *Celtic Mythology and Folklore* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), p. 411.



Patrick MacGill's *The Great Push* where the author dreams of 'gazing along my own glen in Donegal with its quiet fields, its sunny braes'.<sup>1</sup> It also contrasts with James Hanley's description in *Our Time is Gone* of the 'sunlight' in which Denny and Fanny Fury 'sat down to tea', which contributed to the making of 'A glorious day'.<sup>2</sup> Hanley's use of italics illustrates the separation of Fanny Fury's image of Ireland with the reality of her situation, that of cleaning the hospital ship. Yet she goes on: "Glorious!" she said. That's the word. The land was glorious' (568). The physical, and emotional, notion of Ireland provides a psychological means of escape for Irishmen and women in the texts of MacGill and Hanley. This is not the case in *Return of the Brute*, where O'Flaherty's home country is interconnected with the author's portrayal of the battlefield.

O'Flaherty's description of No Man's Land also facilitates a consideration of *Return of the Brute* alongside Patrick MacGill *Fear!* as well as a trans-national context in relation to the war writing of soldiers from France and Germany. In *Fear!* MacGill described the effect of an artillery bombardment upon Private Ryder and his comrades:

[We became] masses of cold but animate things cast up from the ooze of the world, at the beginning of time. One Thing crawled in from the boundless black vomit, sat down and looked around at us with dull, apathetic eyes, out of which all feeling was apparently gone. It was covered with mud from head to heel, but at the point where a knee should be the mud had a redder tinge in its pattern. The Thing raised an arm and pointed with a finger at the red in the mud of his trousers.<sup>3</sup>

Liam O'Flaherty and Patrick MacGill use similar imagery to depict the world in which the working class soldiers exist. For O'Flaherty it is a 'primeval earth' and for MacGill it is 'the beginning of time'. In both works this environment has caused soldiers to become something other than men. Liam O'Flaherty described combatants elsewhere in *Return of the Brute* as 'armoured ghosts' and 'ghouls' (54). In *Fear!* Patrick MacGill, as noted in the extract above, likewise described a man, repeatedly, as a 'Thing'.

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Great Push*, p.106.

<sup>2</sup> James Hanley, *Our Time is Gone*, pp. 567-568.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Fear!*, p. 175.

Liam O’Flaherty’s and Patrick MacGill’s descriptions of the battlefield also share broad similarities with other European working class soldier-writers. The French soldier Gabriel Chevallier, in his first person memoir *Fear*, also describes the apocalyptic environment and de-evolutionary self-image experienced by the *poilus*:

We are in the middle of a monstrous maelstrom, pieces of sky come crashing down and cover us with rubble, comets collide and crumble, sparking like a short circuit. We are caught in the end of a world. The earth is a burning building and all the exits have been bricked up. We are going to roast in this inferno . . . . Bodies whimper, dribble, soil themselves in shame. Thought prostates itself, begs the cruel powers, the demonic forces. Tormented minds throb weakly. We are worms, writhing to escape the spade.<sup>1</sup>

In the opening pages of his novel *Under Fire* another Frenchman, Henri Barbusse, similarly describes the trenches as follows:

Now, in the sinister light of the storm beneath black dishevelled clouds, dragged and spread across the earth like wicked angels, they seem to see a great livid white plain extend before them [...] figures rise up out of the plain, which is composed of mud and water, and clutch at the surface of the ground, blinded and crushed with mire, like survivors from some monstrous shipwreck. These men seem to be soldiers [...] With its puddles and its banks of slime it looks like an oversized grey canvas sheet floating on the sea, submerged in places. It is not raining, but everything is wet, oozing, sodden, drenched [...] the diluvian scene.<sup>2</sup>

Above, Chevallier describes men as animals without form, ‘worms’, as does Liam O’Flaherty in *Return of the Brute* when describing the drowning of Private Appleby in ‘a quagmire’ of mud: ‘The fingers of [Appleby’s] left hand opened and closed slowly like the seemingly unguided movement of a worm tossing its head’ (84, 87). It is an image also present in the writing of James Hanley, as discussed in the previous chapter. Yet there, the author was portraying a sense of unity between the men. O’Flaherty and Chevallier deploy it to another effect, highlighting how the environment of the battlefield causes men to regress in a de-evolutionary manner.

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Chevalier, *Fear*, pp. 218-219.

<sup>2</sup> Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire*, pp. 6-8.

Chevallier's depiction lacks the Irish character found within *Return of the Brute*, notably through O'Flaherty's links to 'mud' and 'seals'. The Frenchman's landscape and sensibility, again as in O'Flaherty, is also abject. Yet too, it is less natural than that of the Irishman: in *Fear* Chevallier uses images such as 'like a short circuit' and 'bricked up', while in Barbusse one notes the 'monstrous shipwreck [and] canvas'. These men, for whom France is their home, do not situate their imagery amongst the natural, preferring to imbue their narrative with manmade objects, unlike O'Flaherty, whose novel draws upon pre-war experience of Ireland to depict No Man's Land and, in so doing, taints his relationship to his place of birth. O'Flaherty's childhood on the Aran Islands was one of hardship, violence and privation, akin to the experiences of Patrick MacGill or James Hanley, but unlike O'Flaherty, as noted above, the latter two soldier-writers chose to represent Ireland as an idyllic means of escape from the circumstances of war.

### **Combat As Work**

The place of No Man's Land in Liam O'Flaherty's war writing troubles identity in a different way to the texts of Patrick MacGill and James Hanley. It offers a kind of liminal space, as O'Flaherty totally removes men from their usual military environment and occupation. In both 'The Alien Skull' and *Return of the Brute*, soldiers only occupy the space of No Man's Land: the world outside of this arena, with more varied kinds of work, is not described. O'Flaherty does not depict the routine work undertaken by men on the frontline, since the area between the trenches was a sphere in which the only purpose of soldiers was to survive - usually by finding the enemy, engaging with them and, in many cases, killing. Nothing else mattered in No Man's Land, unlike in the trenches where one maintained a degree of routine through set military procedures at dawn and dusk: mealtimes, sleeping and maintenance of equipment or infrastructure through manual labour. As such, the work of a soldier in No Man's Land, and as depicted by Liam O'Flaherty, was distilled into its barest essence.

The notion of killing as work is powerfully delineated in O’Flaherty’s short story ‘The Alien Skull’. The opening paragraph provides direct evidence that indicates Private Mulhall, whose name is suggestive of Irish heritage, possessed a fighting ability: ‘he was chosen for every dangerous duty, because of his ferocious courage’<sup>1</sup>. His task on this occasion, having been sent out into No Man’s Land on his own, was ‘to bring back a live prisoner’ (236). Although men are implicitly robbed of their features, and hence identity, by mud, by the disfiguration of injury and death, and are associated with more primitive creatures both in terms of their behaviour and their form, O’Flaherty reads violent disposition into their very features. Liam O’Flaherty’s descriptive detail thus portrays to the reader Mulhall’s propensity for violence, specifically through facial description.

John Brannigan states in his *Race in Modern Irish Literature and Culture* that there are ‘lengthy descriptions of facial morphology in [O’Flaherty’s] novels’.<sup>2</sup> While the details provided are not extensive in this short story, the principle, it is argued, remains the same. This is, in part, a knowable, readable surface that ‘stand[s] for all that is concealed and mysterious, in O’Flaherty’s novels’.<sup>3</sup> Thus, one is told that Mulhall’s ‘face was pale, and marked with scars. He had eyes like a ferret. A drooping, fair moustache covered his lip and curled into his mouth. He looked brutal [...]’ (238). Past and present is therefore apparent in Mulhall’s face: he is now ‘brutal’, but the ‘scars’ provide an indication of Mulhall’s past violence. Together, with the description of his eyes, this denotes a sense of predation, like that found in James Hanley’s Irishman Private O’Garra, ‘the weasel’ in *The German Prisoner*. Importantly, the manner in which O’Flaherty conveys a proclivity for violence is

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<sup>1</sup> Liam O’Flaherty, ‘The Alien Skull’ in *The Short Stories of Liam O’Flaherty* (London: Four Square Books, 1966), p. 236. ‘Irish (Leinster): Anglicised form of Gaelic Ó Maolchathail ‘descendant of Maolchathail’, a personal name meaning ‘devotee of (Saint) Cathal’, see ‘Mulhall Name Meaning’, [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) [Accessed 29/01/2016].

<sup>2</sup> John Brannigan, *Race in Modern Irish Literature and Culture*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 116.

undertaken through Mulhall's body. Again, this taps into discourses of 'natural' congenital capacities for violence underpinned by social Darwinistic ideas, chiming disturbingly with eugenic ideas about race and class at that time. Hanley and O'Flaherty both, at moments, perpetuate fashionable notions of class and violence while, in general offering new and more nuanced perspectives of the working-class soldier's experience.

In the story, Mulhall is tasked with bringing back to Entente lines a German prisoner for interrogation. Moments after entering No Man's Land he meets an enemy combatant and, despite initial suspicion on the part of both men there is a brief period of rapprochement.

Then, suddenly a transformation takes place within Mulhall:

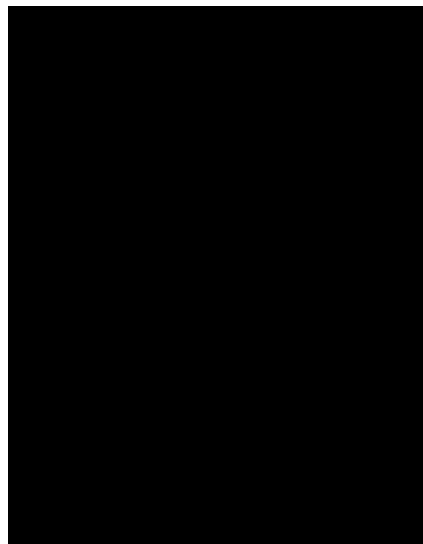
[The German] took off his own helmet, which was shaped differently from Mulhall. Immediately, Mulhall started violently. He became rigid. All his savagery and brutality returned again. The enemy's skull was exposed. As soon as he saw it the lust of blood over-whelmed him, as if he were a beast of prey in sight of his quarry. The enemy's bare skull acted on his senses like a maddening drug. Its shape was alien. It was shaped like a bullet. It had whitish hairs on it. It was hostile, foreign, uncouth, the mark of a beast [...] He wanted to kill. He again felt exalted, gripped by the fury of despair. (241)

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, O'Flaherty's war writing appears rather less than straightforward. In this description, O'Flaherty portrays Mulhall as returning to an established state, one of 'savagery and brutality', one in which the British soldier becomes like an animal, 'a beast of prey'.

O'Flaherty's use of repetition in the above extract is significant for this thesis, as Mulhall is a 'beast of prey' and the German's skull is described as 'the mark of the beast'. In this way, the enemy soldier has become de-familiarised and abject, in this relatively intimate encounter. This is ironic as even a man not motivated by hatred of Britain's enemy is turned into a savage killer by the Great War. O'Flaherty's use of the word 'foreign' is robbed of its geopolitical sense due to the context of the emotional and psychological context of close quarter combat. There is unleashed within Mulhall a rage through which the Irishman is described as viewing the German as abject, existing as both dead and alive: although the

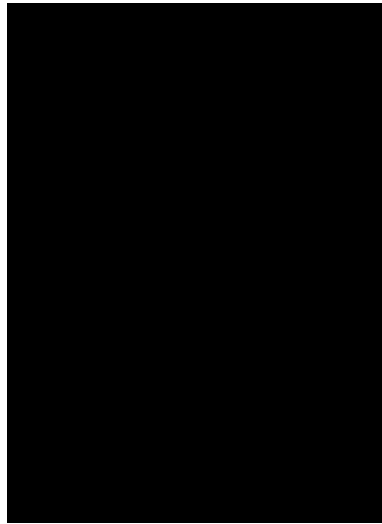
enemy combatant has '[a] skull', it still shows signs of life due to the 'whitish hairs'. As such it is not his nationality that makes the man 'foreign', the enemy *per se*. It is rather, resultant from his existing, in the eyes of Mulhall, in some form of a liminal state, both alive and dead, viewed not as human but 'prey'. It is in this manner O'Flaherty's text connects with the idea, discussed previously in relation to Patrick MacGill and James Hanley, of the savage joy of combat: Mulhall 'wanted to kill. He again felt exalted'.

There is a xenophobia portrayed in this passage towards the enemy that is ironically not dissimilar to that perpetrated against the Irish. British magazines such as *Punch*, *Harper's Weekly* and *Puck* depicted Irishmen as simian-like savages who presented a threat to the Empire and its civilized inhabitants, as is apparent in the image below (Figure Ten):



**Figure Ten**

To some extent, O'Flaherty is thus playing into the hands of those who held stereotypical images of the Irish such as appeared in *Punch*. However, O'Flaherty's text also speaks to the expediency of the British army in recruiting Irish soldiers insofar as they celebrate their natural fighting spirit in order to overcome the threat from German soldiers, similarly portrayed as apes, as the First World War American poster overleaf (Figure Eleven) illustrates:



**Figure Eleven**

O’Flaherty connects this animalistic quality of Mulhall with his propensity for uncontrolled aggression which, in the military world, is viewed by those of a higher rank to the Irish soldier as a ‘ferocious courage’. This unsettling short story, then, offers the reader no comforting message. Instead, violence, and the skill of killing in the course of one’s duty, is portrayed as being celebrated by soldiers of rank, often far from the reality of the frontline. O’Flaherty accordingly presents, unlike the more prosaic narratives of the officers, the notion that it is necessary to experience ‘the lust of blood’ in order to carry out the true work of a soldier.

The notion of fighting as work in *Return of the Brute* is encapsulated by the omniscient narrator’s observation that the men were ‘hardened fighters’. This sentiment permits a connection to be made between the pre-war and wartime experiences of working class men such as Patrick MacGill and Liam O’Flaherty:

[Gunn] was a huge fellow, so burly that he looked stocky, although he was well over six feet in height. He looked a typical fighter, with a thick neck, square jaws and a body like a full sack. His right ear was battered. There was a scar on his left cheek. He was thirty-two years old and he had laboured for wages since his boyhood, but his body had not become demoralised by enslaved toil. Nature had taken great pains with this seemingly crude and large individual, endowing him with muscles and sinews that refused to be stiffened by monotonous labour, and with a spirit that hardship could not conquer. He had a simple soul, which shone through his great, blue eyes;

giving the lie to the cruel strength of his neck, his jaws, his heavy-lipped mouth, his massive shoulders, chest and thighs. He was like a mastiff, that most ferocious-looking and most gentle of all animals; who, however, when roused or made vicious by brutal treatment, becomes as ferocious as he looks. (15-16)

While no known written description of O'Flaherty survives, the age of William Gunn is identical to that of the author and, as previously noted, the former was born into a life of hardship and privation, '[p]overty, famine and death', just like his character. There is a degree of idealism in this pre-war description, to be sure, apparent in the 'spirit no hardship could conquer'. Yet there is little sense of romanticism in this portrayal of Gunn's 'battered' appearance, connected as it is to his working-class heritage, and perhaps even morphology - as in his 'thick neck', a facial 'scar' and 'battered' ear.

Gunn had 'laboured' from an early age becoming likened to an item he may have carried, 'a full sack'; another shapeless image threatening his identity, and even foreshadowing his death - just as Siegfried Sassoon's friend Dick Tiltwood was depicted as being buried in a similar item. Labour here is not the source of a proud identity that it can sometimes be in the other writers under discussion. Instead, it could have a negative effect upon the integrity and power of a more delicate body. His strength in this passage is in spite of 'enslav[ing]' or 'monotonous' work, rather than because of it.

O'Flaherty's description imbues Gunn with a sense of masculinity apparent in 'his massive shoulders, chest and thighs'. All of this contributes to the notion of a fighter, and therefore, a combatant: 'A good soldier means one thing to you and me, but it means another thing to THEM. To you and me it means a MAN. To them it means a \_\_\_\_\_ clod' (160). O'Flaherty's use of capitals sets up a divide between 'THEM' - the military hierarchy and, by extension, the British authorities - and the working-class men. This is further reinforced by the author's use of the term 'clod'; in this context, it is a disparaging description of the soldiers. To the military authorities the men are not only without intellect: they are viewed as



being made of clay, dispensable. Their deaths, and therefore their lives, are of no consequence to the individuals in charge.

There is a further significance in the term ‘clod’ being used to depict the men. As has been considered earlier in this chapter, Liam O’Flaherty had similarly described the conditions of No Man’s Land, including the phrase that ‘[c]lods of dislodged mud slipped from the sides’, while Patrick MacGill described how the soldiers resembled ‘animate things cast up from the earth’. Henri Barbusse, like O’Flaherty, used the word ‘slime’ to portray the ground. It is argued that, in all three instances, although the language is slightly different, the sentiment is the same: the men are, in a sense, portrayed as already shapeless and dead. This is certainly the case with O’Flaherty, as the authorities simply do not care about the men in their charge.

There is a sense of physicality depicted in O’Flaherty’s description of Gunn akin to Patrick MacGill’s portrayal of the navvy Dermot Flynn, as discussed in the first chapter regarding *Children of the Dead End*:

I still had two half-sovereigns in my pocket along with a certain amount of smaller cash, and these coins reminded me of my game [of cards]. But I did not treasure them so much as the long scar stretching across my cheek, and the disfigured eye, which were tokens of the fight in which I thrashed Hell-fire Gahey [...] By instinct I am a fighter. I never shirk a fight, and the most violent contest is a tonic to my soul [...] fighting is not the pastime of a brute; it is the stern reality of a brute’s life. Only by fighting will the fittest survive.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately here, one notes the degree to which the sum total of the two fictional characters’ experiences enable a view of violence in wartime as having some continuities with peacetime. Unlike O’Flaherty, however, where the ferocity is likened to an animal, MacGill gives this description in the first person, thus allowing greater agency in the propensity for violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, pp. 217-218.

## Death In Combat

As has been discussed earlier, a corollary to wartime violence as work is death as portrayed by Liam O'Flaherty, it is argued, in a different manner to that of Patrick MacGill, James Hanley, or any of the officer-writers sketched earlier. In *Return of the Brute*, as the British soldiers advance across No Man's Land they come under attack from an unseen German machine gun, causing them 'to tear at the mud, without making the slightest impression on the ground. It was a mass of sticky slime. But they worked furiously, without thought, without hope of achieving anything, merely obeying the order to drive their tools into the earth' (118). O'Flaherty records a momentary return to the undertaking of manual labour, even if the author describes it is a fruitless task: the 'mud [and] slime' prevents progress, thereby encapsulating, in a small manner, the pointlessness of war. Connected with this moment in the text is the sense that O'Flaherty departs from the traditional idea of fighting to include the randomness of modern warfare. In Patrick MacGill's *Fear!* and James Hanley's *The German Prisoner*, for instance, this has been depicted in a different manner. Both portray instances of killing enacted face-to-face: Ryder bayonetting the German soldier, or Reiburg being savagely murdered by Elston and O'Garra.

In *Return of the Brute* the idea of chance enters the literary depiction of warfare when, as the men are attempting to find cover, one is wounded by a distant machine gun: '[Private] Friel was lying down again to dig, he made a loud sound in his nostrils and then grunted. [He] had been shot six times through the stomach' (119). The notion of futility, made apparent as the men were digging, is transposed onto their attempts to assist their injured comrade: '[they] tried to bandage the wound, but it was impossible to do so, as the stomach seemed full of holes. On account of the filthy state of their hands and their utter weariness, they only added to the poor wretch's agony without helping him' (121). Patrick MacGill's depiction, as advanced in his memoir *The Great Push*, working as a stretcher bearer and bringing

comfort to men such as the dying German officer, becomes, in *Return of the Brute*, the futile efforts afforded to Private Friel.

There also appears in O'Flaherty's depictions of death, such as that of Private Friel, a sense of first-hand experience. It is as though the writer is not simply reporting actions but recording, perhaps even remembering, a lived moment. This idea is initially perceptible in the above-quoted sentence's third clause apparent in a sense of resignation in the phrase 'the stomach seemed full of holes'. This persists as O'Flaherty depicts the moment of death:

Friel uttered a horrible moan and clawed at them. Then he began to wriggle and a great gush of blood issued from his stomach through the field bandages they had placed on it. His face contorted. He bared his teeth, opened his mouth and just when he was going to close it, Reilly thrust the handle of his jack-knife between the teeth. His jaws closed with a snap; he shivered, and strange gurgling noises issued from his throat [...] Friel began to make sounds like a dummy, loutish mumbling. He threw out his right leg and tapped the ground violently with his heel. Then he shook all over and lay still, all except his chest, which rose and fell slowly, at long intervals, causing a rumble in his throat. Another stream of blood gushed forth, covering Reilly's hand [...] The jack-knife was still in Friel's mouth. Reilly forced open the jaws and pulled it out. The jaws would not close. (121-122)

As one would expect from an ex-soldier, O'Flaherty demonstrates a familiarity with military terminology, apparent here in his use of the phrases 'field bandage' and 'jack-knife'.

However, there is also a degree of detail that conveys a sense of authenticity in the description of the man's death: Friel 'shivered', uttered 'strange gurgling noises [...] loutish mumblings', while he 'tapped the ground violently' as the soldier's body acts in an involuntary manner due to shock.

Conveyed in this passage is not only the physical effects of the wound. O'Flaherty repeats the word 'gush', depicting a sense of the hopelessness of the situation, yet there is also the detail portraying the dying man's agony. Friel's actions become animalistic; he 'clawed' at his comrades who work to try to save him, suggesting the idea that a basic instinct is the desire to live. Thus, the reader sees the soldier's agony conveyed through imagery such as: 'His face contorted. He bared his teeth'. The reader is brought face-to-face with a

combatant's last moments, as O'Flaherty's imagery is almost photographic in its detail of portraying a soldier's death. In its own way this extract offers a more strident anti-war message than MacGill's description of the dead being 'nailed to the rolls of honour, crucified'.<sup>1</sup> While MacGill articulates the brutality of war, as does James Hanley in his description of murder in *The German Prisoner*, Liam O'Flaherty takes the reader closer than both of these writers to a 'crucified' soldier when looking upon Friel's death.

Death is, unsurprisingly, widely portrayed by other war writers. Robert Graves, in *Goodbye To All That*, described how one man, Samson, was 'lying wounded about twenty yards away' and could not be reached. Later in the evening Graves managed to retrieve the body, noting: 'I found he had forced his knuckles into his mouth to stop himself crying out and attracting any more men to their deaths. He had been hit in seventeen places'.<sup>2</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, describes how, during an attack, he was next to a soldier, Lance-Corporal Kendle:

I remember seeing him push his tin hat back from his forehead and take aim. After firing once he looked at us with a lively smile; a second later he fell sideways. A blotchy mark showed where the bullet hit him just above the eyes [...] the sudden extinction of Lane-Corporal Kendle.<sup>3</sup>

What is apparent in both of these passages is the sparse, indeed matter-of-fact, manner in which the incidents are recorded - each devoid of details as to the moment of death.

Edmund Blunden's depiction in his *Undertones of War* of the body of a lance-corporal, it is suggested, is the most graphic of all those described by the officer-writers. Blunden, while walking along a trench, came across a soldier boiling water over a fire in order to make tea. Having briefly spoken with the man, Blunden walks on to hear, seconds later, a shell exploded in the vicinity of the combatant:

Soon a cry from that place recalled me; the shell had burst all wrong. Its impression was black and stinking in the paradoss where three minutes ago the lance-corporal's

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Fear!*, p. 279.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye To All That*, pp. 205-206.

<sup>3</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs Of An Infantry Officer*, p. 90.

mess-tin was bubbling over a little flame. For him, how could the gobbets of blackening flesh, the earth-wall sotted with blood, with flesh, the eye under the duckboard, the pulpy bone be the only answer? At this moment, while we looked with dreadful fixity at so isolated a horror, the lance-corporal's brother came round the traverse. He was sent to company headquarters in a kind of catalepsy. The bay had to be put right, and red-faced Sergeant Simmons, having helped himself and me to a share of rum, biting hard on his pipe, shovelled into the sandbag I held, not without self-protecting profanity, and an air of "it's a lie; we're a lie".<sup>1</sup>

Blunden differs from men such as Graves and Sassoon in that he introduces a philosophical dimension to the incident, 'how could the gobbets of flesh [...] be the only answer?', yet he also considers it to be 'so isolated a horror'. The image of a man being reduced to the contents of a 'sandbag' is, as will become apparent, just as graphic as that portrayed by Liam O'Flaherty. Yet what is different, it is posited here, is that Blunden, Graves and Sassoon depict the dead man even as the process of death remains absent.

Indeed this moment, as described by Blunden, has been portrayed on two further occasions since the publishing of *Undertones of War*. Pat Barker, in her fictional novel *Regeneration* (1991), the basis of which is the meeting at Craiglockhart Hospital between Dr. W. H. R. Rivers and Siegfried Sassoon, also depicts this event:

[Lt. Prior] glanced down, and found himself staring at an eye. Delicately, like somebody selecting a particularly choice morsel from a plate, he put his thumb and forefinger down through the duckboards [...] He could see his hand shaking, but the shaking didn't seem to be anything to do with him. "What am I supposed to do with this gob-stopper?"<sup>2</sup>

A second instance of the use of Blunden's description of 'the eye under the duckboard' is in the film version of *Regeneration* (1997). In all three contexts the imagery is extremely powerful, the eye detached from the body conveying to the reader a sense both that it is still able to see and that it is, in Barker's description, something other; merely an inanimate object. However, in both Edmund Blunden's initial description of 'the eye' and Pat Barker's appropriation of it, the moment of the Lance-Corporal's death is neglected.

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 103.

A difference between these officers and O'Flaherty's portrayal is the extent to which the men attending to the wounded are doing their job; it is an element of their work. This notion of soldiers labouring is further connected in O'Flaherty's novel to the process of Private Jennings dying:

He had thrown up his right arm to shield his face from the grenade burst. It was hanging by a strip of skin within the sleeve of his great-coat, shattered below the elbow [...] His hand hung incongruously downwards as he held up his arm. Blood was pouring from the wound in full stream. His sleeve was becoming dark as the blood soaked through the cloth [...] His eye balls protruded like those of a rabbit, whose neck has been smartly broken. Froth bubbled on his lips as he babbled. (142)

Again, one can note not only graphic details of the injury but also the wider effect of such a traumatic event upon the man's body. On this occasion, there is a concerted effort on behalf of his comrades to work on Jennings:

"Lie down, blast you!" cried the Corporal, crawling over on his belly. "Cut that bloody sleeve, Crap. Off with his puttees".  
"Oh! I see," whimpered Jennings. "I'm really wounded. I do hope it's not serious. I'm bleeding. By Jove!"  
"Bloody artery is cut", said the Corporal. "Off with his puttees. Something to burn it ... quick. Stop talking blast you".  
They threw Jennings on the ground with violence, as he insisted on trying to stand up. (143)

The Corporal is in charge and his language is that of orders being given: short, staccato phrases convey a sense of urgency, while the ellipses provides the reader with time - a moment to stop and imagine the significance of the Corporal's orders: the need to cauterise the artery to prevent Jennings bleeding to death. The injured man's comrades continue to try and help:

They had no means of treating such a wound properly, so they tied puttees about his arm and lashed it double; but still the blood gushed. Jennings began to rave. His face became an extraordinary colour. Already his uninjured hand looked like the hand of a corpse. He could not hold his head steady on his neck. (143)

As has been discussed throughout the thesis, the body has been depicted as representing masculinity, be that in connection with manual work or fighting. Both of these, as has been

seen in relation to all three Irish soldier-writers, exude vitality. The notion of reassurance is also registered through the touch of one man on another, such as in the instances of soldiers marching in column formation. In this passage O'Flaherty is using the body for a different purpose: the author depicts to the reader the approach of death. In Sassoon's writing above, Lance-Corporal Kendle's 'extinction' was 'sudden'. Yet in O'Flaherty's text one can note that, as 'the blood gushed', Private Jennings changed 'colour', becoming like 'a corpse' as he could no longer 'hold his head steady' as the soldier's motor functions close down.

There are two further aspects connected to O'Flaherty's representation of death of significance here: the first connects with Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject. As has been discussed in previous chapters, the abject has been considered in relation to Patrick MacGill and James Hanley. Yet what differs in Liam O'Flaherty's writing is the manner in which the author portrays death. As Kristeva argues: '[t]he corpse [...] is death infecting life' which, in the context of *Return the Brute*, is instructive. Although the death of Jennings is portrayed as taking place on a battlefield, the process delineated by O'Flaherty cannot be fully contained within that arena due to details such as the soldier's 'extraordinary colour'; or again, that his 'hand looked like the hand of a corpse'. Likewise, 'he could not hold his head steady on his neck'. What is significant is that this episode in O'Flaherty's text portrays a collapse in meaning due to the loss of difference between subject and object or self and other. As such, it troubles the idea of the 'enemy'. Are the unseen German soldiers those against whom one is fighting or is it death?

A further aspect that is important regarding Liam O'Flaherty's portrayal of death is the extent to which the author illustrates the changing notion of work for the soldiers. Here one can note the physical, practical and indeed violent nature of men's actions toward one another - even in an attempt to save life. This is a reality of war often missing from the officer-writer's portrayals of death. There, as noted above, the narrative remains measured

and, to a degree, undemonstrative. The instance of violence exhibited to Private Jennings is an act of loyalty to one's comrade and a moment presented to the reader of individuals under stress while in combat. It represents an unreflective act indicative of practical knowledge, skill and resolve, as death is in this passage a technical challenge as well as a horror. This is a moment of work for the soldiers, one in which they take pride, apparent in the fact that despite having 'no means of treating such a wound properly' they improvised, and tried, although ultimately the men are deprived of time as Jennings dies, despite their efforts to save him.

In *Return of the Brute* the portrayal of death allows no moment for reflection because the pace of the narrative drives the action forward, unlike in the examples discussed earlier from Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon and Edmund Blunden. There, the depiction is rather more measured, with the two former officers simply reporting on events while Blunden admits the reader into a more philosophical depiction of the internal perspective of the author. Liam O'Flaherty's use of such detailed description is unique in this thesis due to the proximity the author brings the reader to the moment of death, a process that enabled the author to go on to portray the psychological effect on those who witnessed such events.

### **Trauma In A Working-Class Soldier**

There is a further aspect to the physical, external character of Private Gunn, '[the] fighter'. This is the internal, specifically his psychological breakdown as he experiences war-induced trauma. The subject of trauma is one that, as noted previously, is apparent in the penultimate chapter of Patrick MacGill's *Fear!*, when Private Ryder hides in a church during an attack because, as he narrates, 'my blood ceased to run, my very limbs became frozen'.<sup>1</sup> Robert Graves, in *Goodbye To All That* similarly acknowledges the impact his wartime experiences had upon him: 'I was very thin, very nervous [...] My disabilities were many; I could not use

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Fear!*, p. 300.



a telephone, I was sick every time I travelled in a train, and if I saw more than two people in a single day it prevented me from sleeping'.<sup>1</sup> Graves also described how, for him, '[t]he war was not yet over [...]' because he suffered from day-dreams in which images from the war intruded upon lectures at Oxford University: 'Indeed they did not leave me until well on in 1928 [since my] emotion-recording apparatus had failed after Loos'.<sup>2</sup>

Siegfried Sassoon, on one specific occasion in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, is rather more detailed in the hallucinations he experienced. In contrast to Robert Graves, as a wartime patient in Craiglockhart Hospital, Sassoon experienced:

[s]hapes of mutilated soldiers came crawling across the floor; the floor seemed to be littered with fragments of mangled flesh. Faces glared upward; hands clutched at neck or belly; a livid grinning face with bristly moustache peered at me above the edge of my bed; his hands clawed at my sheets. Some were like the dummy figures used to deceive snipers; others were alive and looked at me reproachfully, as though envying the warm safety of life which they'd longed for when they shivered in the gloomy dawn, waiting for the whistles to blow and the bombardment to lift.<sup>3</sup>

What is significant for this discussion is that Patrick MacGill, Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon - the latter two clearly traumatized by their experiences - do not record the process by which they became ill. In *Return of the Brute*, however, O'Flaherty portrays, through symptoms apparent in Gunn's body, what it may feel to succumb to this illness, one that affected the author across his later life.

The war-induced trauma suffered by Private Gunn manifests itself in eleven episodes that occur throughout the novel, represented as physical sensations and hallucinations experienced by the soldier. On the first occasion: '[Gunn] felt a pain in his eye sockets, and he kept shutting his eyes in order to hide from little balls of fire that kept approaching him from out of the darkness' (RTB/46). As the text progresses the symptoms become gradually more intense, from there being 'a sharp pain in his skull' (83) to the sensation that 'Gunn felt

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye To All That*, pp. 355-356.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 362-363.

<sup>3</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs Of An Infantry Officer*, p. 248.

something, actually alive, leaping against his ribs and against the walls of his stomach, struggling to break forth' (108). Gunn also believed that he was being watched by the military; 'the great machine [...] "It" could read his mind' (74). The hallucinations increase in intensity as later, in the novel, he believes that his comrades have become apes: 'The brutes kept springing up all round him, moving about, making strange gestures with their paws, calling on him to join them' (148), with Gunn later viewing himself as being 'the superior brute' (158).

What O'Flaherty is depicting through Gunn's hallucinations could be viewed, earlier discussed with reference to 'The Alien Skull', as playing into the hands of those who depicted the Irish as savages. It is argued in this thesis, however, that what O'Flaherty is actually portraying is the dehumanising effects of warfare upon combatants. The ability of Gunn, '[the] typical fighter' to carry out his work as an infantryman, resulted in his illness. This is significant due to the context in which *Return of the Brute* was published, 1929. This was a time when war-induced trauma was little understood, while men who suffered from its effects were – at least from some quarters such as the British Ministry of Pensions, as mentioned earlier - vilified as malingerers. O'Flaherty's texts brings to readers, from an author who was a sufferer, an insight into the cause and effects of trauma as brought on by wartime military service on the Western Front.

Liam O'Flaherty's depiction of the symptoms displayed by Private Gunn are similar to those outlined by Charles S. Myers, the doctor who coined a term used for many years to describe such a condition, apparent in the title of his text, *Shell Shock in France 1914-1918*: '[It is] loss of power of concentration, headache, giddiness, asthenopia [...] obsessions, anxieties, fears, and delusions (especially of persecution)'.<sup>1</sup> The physician who treated Siegfried Sassoon's trauma at the military hospital Craiglockhart, W.H. R. Rivers, identified

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<sup>1</sup> Charles S. Myers, *Shell Shock in France 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), p. 27.

in his *Instinct and the Unconscious* (1922) what he perceived to be a differentiation between the men and officers. The former, he argued, due to their ‘simpler mental training’, are more likely to exhibit symptoms such as ‘dumbness or the helplessness of a limb’. By contrast the officers, who had a ‘[more] complex and varied’ mental life had been taught to ‘repress, not only expressions of fear, but also the emotion itself’.<sup>1</sup>

Elaine Showlater, in her *The Female Malady*, expands upon W.H.R. Rivers’ comments. She divides the symptoms associated with war-induced trauma into two broad groups: the physical for the men in the ranks - ‘hysteria, paralysis, blindness, deafness, contracture of a limb, mutism, limping’ - and the cerebral for officers, ‘neurastheni[a], nightmares, insomnia, heart palpitations, dizziness, depression, or disorientation [...]’.<sup>2</sup> It is argued that *Return of the Brute*, in mirroring these physical symptoms, does chime with Showalter’s ‘hysteria’. Yet in so doing it heightens, not diminishes, the idea of masculinity. As has been noted throughout the thesis, the Irish soldier-writers equated masculinity, both in peace and wartime, with fighting and vice versa. Thus, while there may be a difference in symptoms, it is not a question of masculinity but rather a reaction to extreme conditions of combat. However, in the following chapter, as will become apparent, in O’Flaherty’s portrayal of Fergus O’Connor’s trauma in *The Black Soul*, the narrative challenges such a binary depiction of an illness as the author, depicts within a working class ex-soldier a mixture of symptoms, both physical and psychological.

Although Liam O’Flaherty’s work was often critically well received, this was not the case with *Return of the Brute*. It appears that only one critical review was written of the novel upon its publication. Georg Grabenhorst, in his ‘A Symposium of the War’ (1929), written for the *Times literary Supplement*, in which six novels written of the conflict were

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<sup>1</sup> W.H.R. Rivers, *Instinct and Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 209-210.

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady* (London: Virago, 2000), p. 174.

critiqued, wrote: 'If Mr. Liam O'Flaherty had set himself to paint of war a more savage and hideous picture that has yet appeared in English and German novels he could not have beaten this'.<sup>1</sup> In this sentence, it can be suggested, Grabenhorst offers a point of view akin to that of William Monk Gibbon, who stated that Patrick MacGill's memoirs, as discussed in the Introduction, were 'perhaps the first books to delineate the protagonists on the western front as they actually were'. MacGill and O'Flaherty, both working class Roman Catholic Irishmen who fought as private in the British army wrote of their experiences with such realism that this was recognised by others. However, Grabenhorst continues his article by suggesting that 'there is, unfortunately, an air of unreality about the whole scene'. Indeed, men such as Gunn were people who 'hardly require the war to make them repulsive'.<sup>2</sup> Arguably in his latter point the critic fails to understand the trauma that O'Flaherty is portraying: it is precisely because of the war that the author's characters act as they do in *Return of the Brute*. As to the notion of 'unreality', it is further argued, this can now be viewed as a testament to O'Flaherty's imagery in that it is so intense, so vivid, such that in 1929 - due perhaps to a lack of awareness of the psychological and physical experiences of soldiers in the First World War - the author's portrayal of combat was not properly understood.

Liam O'Flaherty's novel received little attention in the years that followed Grabenhorst's article. Beyond a brief synopsis of the novel's plot John Zneimer, in *The Literary Vision of Liam O'Flaherty*, fails to expand upon his comments that *Return of the Brute* is 'notable for little'.<sup>3</sup> Patrick F. Sheeran, in his monograph *The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty*, dismisses the work completely, claiming that the purpose of his study was to provide 'a detailed examination of O'Flaherty's novels [but] *Hollywood Cemetery* and *Return*

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Grabenhorst, 'A Symposium of War' (trans.) A. Featherstonhaugh in *Time Literary Supplement*, Nov. 1929, Issue 1451, p. 938.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> John Zneimer, *The Literary Vision of Liam O'Flaherty* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1970), p. 111.

*of the Brute* have not been treated as they do not merit serious critical attention'.<sup>1</sup> P.A. Doyle, in his *Liam O'Flaherty* calls the war novel 'a feeble potboiler'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly James O'Brien, in his *Liam O'Flaherty*, states of the author's war novel that it is a 'crudely and evidently hastily written novel [and] hardly rises above a conventional protest against the horror of trench warfare'.<sup>3</sup>

*Return of the Brute* is indeed a 'protest' novel, one outlining the futility of war but, it can be suggested, O'Brien and the critics who have dismissed O'Flaherty's novel have failed to consider the detail it portrays. It is recognised that some of the imagery may appear crude, for example soldiers depicted as 'brutes'. Yet as Trudi Tate observed in her *Modernism, History and the First World War*, following the armistice of 1918, 'writing attempted to bear witness to the trauma of the war'.<sup>4</sup> Traditional methods of writing folded, often unable to depict life on the frontline. While *Return of the Brute* is not a modernist text, it is possible to view how O'Flaherty 'attempted' to convey what he experienced and to help articulate two points he outlined in *Shame the Devil*. First, as he lay traumatised in an army hospital, O'Flaherty was 'conscious of having something very important to say'; and secondly, as informed by a doctor, O'Flaherty's two dead comrades, with whom O'Flaherty was wounded, were lucky because, although the Irishman had survived, 'you have to go through life with that shell bursting in your head'. *Return of the Brute* can be viewed as being the author's attempt to come to terms with the legacy of that explosion.

## Conclusion

The Introduction to this thesis argued that an examination of Liam O'Flaherty's 'The Alien Skull' and *Return of the Brute* enable a re-evaluation of the Irishman's war writing due to the

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick F. Sheeran, 'Preface' in *The Novels of Liam O'Flaherty: A Study in Romantic Realism* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Paul A. Doyle, *Liam O'Flaherty* (New York: Twayne Publishing, 1971), p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> James O'Brien, *Liam O'Flaherty* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1973), p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 1.

lacuna that currently exists in relation to critical work undertaken on these two texts.

Considering them in the context of the work of Patrick MacGill and James Hanley has enabled both the short story and the novel to be viewed within a wider perspective, rather than purely of O'Flaherty's body of work. As such, it has been demonstrated that 'The Alien Skull' and *Return of the Brute* share aspects akin to the war writing of MacGill and Hanley; the portrayal of work, the body, and violence for example, while, through the imagery of the battlefield, mortally wounded men and the trauma they present suggest a different depiction of the conflict, not only from those of his fellow countrymen but also from the officer-writers.

Liam O'Flaherty, in *Return of the Brute*, brought the reader closer to the reality of life for an infantryman during the First World War than any of the other writers considered in this thesis. It is recognised that Patrick MacGill's portrayal of life at the front revealed the brutality of combat while James Hanley's novella is shocking in its description of an act of murder. Liam O'Flaherty, however, by depicting the 'other worldly' quality of the battlefield, and then taking the reader in focused detail to the wounding and death of a soldier, articulates an environment in which one can better understand the trauma suffered by Private Gunn. Although this character is a casualty of war, as he too is killed, in the following chapter another victim of the conflict, albeit one who survived, is further portrayed: the homecoming to Ireland of Fergus O'Connor, the traumatised ex-soldier in Liam O'Flaherty's novel *The Black Soul*, a text that will now be considered.

## Chapter Six: “An enemy of your country”: Liam O’Flaherty’s *The Black Soul*

### Introduction

In the novel examined in this chapter, Liam O’Flaherty’s *The Black Soul*, there is a key change of location, moving from No Man’s Land, as portrayed in *Return of the Brute*, to interwar rural Ireland, upon the return to civilian life of Fergus O’Connor, a Roman Catholic, working-class Irishman who had fought in the British army. In *The Black Soul*, O’Flaherty portrays a veteran soldier who, as an Irishman, was largely invisible to the British army in which he served. Through O’Connor’s return to Ireland the author portrays an aspect associated with the aftermath of the conflict perhaps not experienced by other individuals who had fought: the negative reaction of many within one’s own country who, on political grounds, did not support those who had fought for the British.

The lives of Irish men and women who were connected to the war by work, and through family in the case of Fanny Fury, have been considered to this point but here, in *The Black Soul*, O’Flaherty portrays not just the homecoming to Ireland of an ex-soldier but also one suffering psychologically from war-induced trauma. Unlike in *Return of the Brute*, in which the reader is shown the progressive onset of this condition, here one is privy to its ongoing impact upon a man during his year on Inverara, an island located off Ireland’s west coast. Inverara is a fictionalised depiction of the author’s childhood Irish home, the Aran Islands.

*The Black Soul* was Liam O’Flaherty’s second novel, published five years prior to *Return of the Brute*. Switching the chronology of O’Flaherty’s texts has two key benefits to the thesis. Firstly, as mentioned previously, it permits one to read the depiction of O’Connor’s illness within the wider context of the inter-war period in Ireland such as hostility felt, and on occasion demonstrated physically, by Irish nationalists toward those who had fought in the war for the British. Further, although the journey from Patrick MacGill’s *The Amateur Army* to O’Flaherty’s *The Black Soul* is not linear - with each of the three

writers privileging slightly different aspects of the Great War - there remains a degree of chronological progression within the thesis. Having begun with the infantry training camps of St. Albans, England, depicted by MacGill in *The Amateur Army*, one moves to the trenches of France, portrayed contemporaneously in *The Red Horizon*, *The Great Push* and, later, in *Fear!* Varying descriptions of combat are then described in James Hanley's *The German Prisoner*, *Our Time is Gone* and Liam O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute*. This culminates in O'Flaherty's depiction, in *The Black Soul*, of an inter-war homecoming to Ireland of British army veteran Fergus O'Connor, also referred to throughout the text as 'the Stranger'.<sup>1</sup> Through this overarching structure the broad connection that Irish, Roman Catholic, working-class men and women had with different aspects of the First World War emerges.

*The Black Soul* is unique in the context of this thesis as is the only text by an Irish soldier-writer to detail a combatant's post-conflict world. There is, however, reference to this period in Patrick MacGill's novel *Fear!*, evident in the epigraph to the concluding chapter: '1919. A pub outside the Crystal Palace. Shorey and MacMahon stood at the bar, looking at one another across their beer glasses'.<sup>2</sup> MacGill's final section is similar to that of a play: this opening detail gives one the impression of stage directions, and the entire chapter is presented in dialogue form. The purpose of MacGill's adoption of pure speech, it is suggested, succinctly provides the reader with details of Arthur Ryder's death in battle as the two ex-soldiers discuss wartime events. In his use of speech MacGill presents the fate of Private Ryder from the perspective of two characters the reader has followed throughout the text, whose fortune had been to that point in the narrative, like that of the narrator Ryder, has been unknown.

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<sup>1</sup> Liam O'Flaherty, *The Black Soul* (London: Florin Books, 1936), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Fear!*, p. 317.



The broad significance of O'Flaherty's novel here is that no reference to post-1918 Ireland is portrayed by Patrick MacGill or James Hanley. Their writing remains restricted to the conflict, with representations of home being viewed from afar and couched in terms, as has been previously discussed, which present Ireland in an idealised manner. The officer-writers' depiction of the inter-war world is similarly limited: Edmund Blunden, R .C. Sheriff and Siegfried Sassoon, in their works considered here, also make no mention at all of the period following demobilisation.

In *Goodbye To All That*, however, Robert Graves does outline his inter-war experiences. What is noteworthy about Graves's portrayal of life in Britain after the conflict is the fact that he finds re-adjustment difficult. When, following demobilisation, Graves went up to Oxford University, he described how, '[i]n the middle of a lecture I would have a sudden very clear experience of men on the march up the Bethune-La Bassée Road [...] Or I would be in a barn with my first platoon of the Welsh Regiment [...] Or it would be a deep dug-out at Cambrin, where I was talking to a signaller'. Graves, however, does not pursue details about such incidents, which lasted 'until well into 1928'.<sup>1</sup> The context for Liam O'Flaherty's depiction of the lasting effects of trauma is thus very different to Graves, as *The Black Soul* reveals how such an illness was compounded by O'Flaherty's Irish identity and the ambivalence - indeed hostility - exhibited toward the returning soldier in Ireland. The figure of the homecoming warrior recurs throughout Western literature; indeed, one has only to consider Homer's *Odyssey*, Rebecca West's Chris Baldry in *Return of the Soldier* or, as will be considered in this chapter, Septimus Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. Unlike Baldry or Smith, however, Liam O'Flaherty's returning soldier has to struggle with more than his own experiences: O'Connor, in *The Black Soul*, must contend with Ireland's uneasy relationship to the war.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye To All That*, pp. 362-363.

The hostile position of some in Ireland to men serving in the British military during the war was described by Liam O’Flaherty in his autobiography, *Shame the Devil*. There he noted how, upon his return to Dublin in 1918, having been medically discharged from the Irish Guards, ‘[he] was regarded as a pariah and a fool and a renegade. Those who did not hate me for having worn an English uniform pitied me, which was equally unpleasant’.<sup>1</sup> From this one can note that O’Flaherty himself clearly experienced an ‘unpleasant’ time in the country’s capital. A short time later, O’Flaherty travelled back to his family’s home on the Aran Islands describing how, when he arrived there, he was ‘an ill man, without money, disillusioned’.<sup>2</sup> These sentences, it can be suggested, anticipate the reception and travel of Fergus O’Connor in *The Black Soul*, whose journey from urban metropolis to Ireland’s rural west coast mirrors that of the author. O’Connor, also ‘an ill man’ traumatised by war, is similarly ‘disillusioned’ and considered in the novel as a ‘pariah’. This portrayal completes the story of the ambivalence and ambivalent feelings of the Irish soldier-writers toward their own war service, an aspect discussed in relation to Patrick MacGill’s memoirs, and his propagandist writing, as well as James Hanley’s portrayal of work in *Our Time is Gone* - both of which portray Irish men, and women, as émigrés - yet now in *The Black Soul* it is from the other side, that of home.

### **Liam O’Flaherty And Rural Ireland**

The Aran Islands assume a cultural significance here, more than just being Liam O’Flaherty’s childhood home and the basis of his descriptions for the fictional Inverara. This landmass is the most westerly point of Ireland and, as Declan Kiberd notes in his *Inventing Ireland*, was the location of ‘a scattered Irish-speaking community’ to which writers such as John

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<sup>1</sup> Liam O’Flaherty, *Shame the Devil*, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Millington Synge sought to 'return to the source' of what it was to be Irish.<sup>1</sup> As Tim

Robinson argues in his 'Introduction' to the Penguin edition of Synge's *The Aran Islands*:

the Aran islanders [also] found themselves elected to a literary and even a metaphysical status by the romantic nationalism which was transforming Ireland's image of itself. Successive generations of Irish thinkers – many of them members of the Protestant Ascendancy – were founding their separatist claims on the rediscovery of the Celtic soul, essentially at odds with the mundane progressivism of the Anglo-Saxon. And this ancient, mysterious, spirit guide of the nation was called forth from the humble cottages of the last living representatives of Celtic purity, the Irish-speaking farm and fisherfolk, and pre-eminently those of the western seaboard. Aran, that forlorn outcrop of want, was to become one of the chief shrines of this Ireland of the mind.<sup>2</sup>

In *The Black Soul* O'Flaherty, it is argued, does more than simply depict an ex-soldier returning home. O'Flaherty places Fergus O'Connor onto an island viewed by many as the heartland of a renewed Ireland, despite its peripheral location, one that was essentially at 'odds' with 'the Anglo-Saxon'. On one level O'Flaherty positions his character in a space charged with cultural and social significance. In so doing O'Flaherty is able to connect with an Irish literary history and so tap into what Tim Robinson described as 'this Ireland of the mind' - the purpose of which, it is suggested here, assisted with the novel's commercial and social interest, both at home and in Britain. There is also a degree of irony in O'Flaherty's portrayal of an Irishman who, having fought for the British army seeks, and finds solace in, a location deemed by many to be a vital source of 'Celtic purity'. However, this apparent dichotomy is important because it highlights Liam O'Flaherty's complex relationship to Ireland and the war, emerging from *The Black Soul*.

One aspect of O'Flaherty's multifaceted association with Ireland can be found in his treatment of the community on Inverara in *The Black Soul*, specifically the working class peasants, one of whom, Little Mary, is key to O'Connor's recovery from his war-induced trauma. In wider literary terms the peasant was a figure that had often come to represent

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<sup>1</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Robinson, 'Introduction' in J.M. Synge, *The Aran Islands* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. xv.

‘Celtic purity’. Writers closely associated with the Irish Literary Revival, individuals such as W.B. Yeats, George Russell (AE), Isabella Augusta Gregory and Douglas Hyde, each depicted Irish peasants in their literature. To W.B. Yeats, for example, the figure of the peasant became a means by which the poet could explore his interests in romanticism, nationalism, the occult and folklore by connecting to what he viewed as the cultural essence of his homeland. This is as reflected in his poem ‘The Municipal Gallery Revisited’:

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory thought  
All that we did, all that we said or sang  
Must come from contact with the soil, from that  
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong,  
We three alone in modern times had brought  
Everything down to that sole test again,  
Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.<sup>1</sup>

It was the peasant in ‘contact with the soil’ who, provided they remained in touch with Ireland, could grow to be as invincible as the figure Antaeus in Greek mythology. Thus Ireland represents a maternal figure, providing sustenance to those of the Irish Literary Revival and ‘the beggar-man’ alike. This is important for this thesis because, as will become apparent, it is precisely this relationship of a peasant to ‘the soil’, allied together with Ireland’s ancient history, that aids in Fergus O’Connor’s recovery.

### **Continuity: Peacetime Environment As Battlefield**

In *Return of the Brute*, as has been considered previously, Liam O’Flaherty included in his depiction of the battlefield descriptions taken from his experiences on the Aran Islands. In *The Black Soul*, it is argued, Liam O’Flaherty reverses that process by portraying the island of Inverara as an environment similar to that of a battlefield. The novel is divided into four sections, one for each season, beginning with winter. Three times in the novel’s opening two

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<sup>1</sup> W. B. Yeats, ‘The Municipal Gallery Revisited’ in *Yeats’s Poems*, ed. by A. Norman Jeffares (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989), Stanza VI, lines 41-47, p. 439. Antaeus would challenge passers-by to wrestle and, provided he remained in contact with his mother, the earth, he could not be beaten. He was finally defeated by Heracles who, having lifted Antaeus off his feet, crushed him to death.

pages O'Flaherty writes that 'In winter all things die' (13-14), a sentiment compounded by the author's description of a storm:

Winter had come. The sea was wrecking all that had generated in spring, flowered in summer and borne fruit in autumn. It tore huge rocks from its bosom and sent them rumbling through the deep. It hurled weeds shorewards in a tumbling mass. They lined the beaches in mounds mixed with sand and the carcasses of dogfish. It struck the cliffs monstrous blows that shook them and sent the rockbirds screaming from their clefts. They soared wildly out, their eyes searching the foam for fish. (13-14).

There is a violence in this passage emerging from language such as 'wrecking [...] tore [...] hurled [...] blows [...] screaming'. This imagery is further strengthened where the wind was 'blasting the earth', such that '[o]ld men sitting by the fires in their cabins shivered and felt that their death was near' (14). In the context of this thesis the word 'blasting', allied with O'Flaherty's violent imagery, assumes a particular significance for two reasons. Firstly, this description of the landscape is akin to that of the pre-war experience of the navy, often a touchstone of Irish emigrant experience at this time. As discussed in Chapter One, Patrick MacGill described how 'I could hear the dynamite exploding, and shattering to pieces the rock in which it was lodged [...] my mates toiling amidst the broken earth, the sharp ledges of hewn-rock [...]'.<sup>1</sup> Although the vocabulary is not identical the sentiment remains comparable: the pre and inter-war worlds of the Irish working-class, for navy and peasant alike, included elements of violence and danger, irrespective of whether it was manmade or natural. This anticipates the wartime experiences of men such as Fergus O'Connor, rather than making the war an absolute rupture it was understood to be in the lives of those from a different class, notably the officer-writers considered in this thesis.

Further, the image of the 'old men' sheltering from the 'blasting' storm is similar to that of soldiers enduring a bombardment, such as Patrick MacGill described in *Fear!*:

We are all lying at the bottom of the trench, huddled in the mud [...] Rain, wind, flashes, hisses and screams played a mad concert over us. It seemed as if a million monsters had suddenly been loosened on the world. There was no respite or truce

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, pp. 236 and 244.

now, no pause for taking breath. In the inexhaustible resources there seemed no end, the mad din breathed cowardice in its wild prodigality. All this was sent out for one purpose and that the destruction of human lives.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed a comparable sentiment is apparent in Liam O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute*, when the men take cover from enemy fire: 'There was a roar above their heads, as if the earth had burst and was flying about in clashing fragments, rebursting, revolving'.<sup>2</sup> There is thus a close connection between wartime and peacetime imagery present in a shared inability of the men to have any control over their immediate future. In both cases, the individuals are at the mercy of a force greater than themselves. In the war writing of all three Irish soldier-writers the destruction is manmade while, in *The Black Soul*, as the extract above illustrates, it is nature that is wild, turbulent and destructive. Working-class men, both in peacetime and war, each face the possibility of a similar outcome, as O'Flaherty expressed in *The Black Soul*: 'Death, death, death'. (67).

At this stage it is appropriate to consider a review, written by an anonymous critic in 1924 for *The English Review*, which was less than complimentary of Liam O'Flaherty's portrayal of the island and its inhabitants. It thereby illustrates the perhaps unimaginative expectations of certain English readers. The reviewer stated that *The Black Soul* '[is a] clever book which only just fails of impressiveness'.<sup>3</sup> The text continues, making reference to O'Connor's illness: 'We see rather too much of the shell-shocked interior and not enough of the very picturesque peasantry and their ways although they and their surroundings and the moods of eternal sea are well suggested'.<sup>4</sup> There are two elements of this observation relevant to this thesis: firstly, this position seems rather outdated, demonstrating a clear colonial condescension to a twenty-first century reader. The critic's use of the phrase 'picturesque peasantry' in the context of the novel's subject matter appears to suggest a

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick McGill, *Fear!*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>2</sup> Liam O'Flaherty, *Return of the Brute*, p.116.

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, 'The Black Soul' in *The English Review, 1908-1937*, ed. by Ernest Remnant Sept. 1924, p. 435.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

cultural expectation that an Irish writer, even when depicting the First World War and its after-effects, would still be required to produce something charming, and inoffensive, especially when writing a novel that depicts rural Ireland. The significance lies in the notion that the Irish soldier-writers are in the main not delivering what may have been expected of them by some of the British public. The sentimental scrutiny applied to landscape and community in Irish writing at this time makes the loaded and complex representations of these things in these writers' war writing particularly illuminating.

Further, as has been considered in previous chapters, Patrick MacGill's narrator in *The Red Horizon* does allow himself to romanticise Ireland as an escape from the onslaught of war, as does James Hanley in *Our Time is Gone*. Both build a picture of the emigrant experience, and as such, it has a specific function in these writings – rather than not in the Irish genre fiction that the critic appears to have anticipated. Liam O'Flaherty's depiction of Ireland as, notionally, home for the character Fergus O'Connor seems very different from the more idealised portrayals of Ireland, as considered in previous chapters of this thesis. Patrick MacGill and James Hanley highlight images of Ireland that enter the consciousness of Irish men and women who are working in roles connected to the conflict while living outside of Ireland. As noted earlier, in an epithet to the opening chapter of *The Red Horizon*, Patrick MacGill wrote: 'I wish that I were back again/In the glens of Donegal'.<sup>1</sup> This sentiment appears immediately prior to MacGill's initial description of his journey from England to France on a military troopship. Even before reaching the trenches, MacGill expresses the desire to be back in Ireland.

James Hanley, in *Our Time is Gone*, invokes similar imagery to repeatedly describe how, for both Fanny and Desmond Fury, Ireland was 'home'.<sup>2</sup> The text portrays Ireland as

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick MacGill, *The Red Horizon*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> James Hanley, *Our Time is Gone*, p. 136.

an idyll where, in contrast to the urban ‘rotten hole’ (OTG/46) of Gelton, Ireland was ‘sunlight [...] ‘a cool place’ [...] ‘Glorious!’ (567-568) Ireland becomes a site of psychological sanctuary in times of hardship in the works of MacGill and Hanley where the ‘Celtic purity’, referred to earlier, lies in the comforting warmth of MacGill’s landscape - one that is ‘sunny [...] neat [...] sparkling [and] green’ - all of which conveys a sense of fertility or tranquillity.

What is significant about Liam O’Flaherty’s environment in *The Black Soul*, it is argued, is the notion that the wildness of the island provides a place in which it was easier than in an urban environment for a traumatised and emotionally turbulent character like O’Connor to fit back into society. This allows for a kind of pathetic fallacy, as his inner turmoil finds expression in the wild landscape. The idea is proposed here that such a veteran may initially find the destructive power of nature, rather than urban chaos, to be a more conducive environment in which to re-adjust to civilian life: it is akin to that of the battlefield, but without the direct danger of combat. Thus O’Connor’s inner turmoil, in the first instance, is matched by his surroundings, which themselves are not so removed from those of wartime. Gradually, as the seasons progress and nature assumes a more benign quality, then, also with the help of Little Mary, O’Connor’s health improves.

### **Wartime Trauma In Peacetime**

Liam O’Flaherty goes further than simply describing the landscape of Aran in terms akin to a battlefield. References to nature cause O’Connor to relive, in a traumatic manner, his wartime experiences:

[O’Connor] started at every sound. He couldn’t see O’Daly, but he could hear his quavering voice. The sea rolling on the beach reminded him of the ‘keene’<sup>1</sup> women at wakes over dead bodies [Then] his mouth gaped as the picture of the night he was buried by a shell in France flashed before his mind. A cormorant called dismally passing over the house. He listened to the swishing wings. Then his right knee began

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<sup>1</sup> The word ‘keene’ is from the Gaelic *caoineadh*, which means to ‘to cry, to weep’; it is a traditionally vocal lament by women at funerals.



to tremble. His left foot began to tap the ground. He bent down carefully to hold it steady' (63).

There is a strong degree of physicality in this passage: an auditory trigger, the sea, provides O'Connor an association with death, through the "keene" women', and so to experiencing a visual hallucination as he relives '[being] buried by a shell in France'.

The idea of reliving a traumatic experience is one advanced by Sigmund Freud in his 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in which he stated that a person suffering from trauma 'is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of [...] remembering it as belonging to the past'.<sup>1</sup> The reason for such repetition, Freud argued, is in order for the individual to 'master' what was such an intense original experience.<sup>2</sup> While this thesis does not attempt a Freudian reading of Liam O'Flaherty's war writing what is significant is the manner in which the soldier-writer portrays O'Connor's repetition of a traumatic incident. O'Flaherty does so by describing both the physiological and psychological toll war-induced trauma has taken upon the working-class ex-soldier.

The three images discussed above, 'sea rolling', 'the "keene" women' and 'buried by a shell' are all superficially unconnected, random thoughts that, it is argued, are symptomatic of the disordered state of O'Connor's mind. Further, although the ex-soldier does not die, there is an unmistakable presentiment of death. The word 'buried', with its obvious connotation, draws to mind the notion of death but also, as discussed in relation to Patrick MacGill, reminds of the manner in which combatants were often interred. Moreover, there is a third idea of death in this passage: the 'cormorant' is an animal associated in Irish mythology with death. Accordingly, in this short passage O'Flaherty's use of a reference to everyday sounds on a small island, 'the sea', introduces to the reader how a mundane,

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 32.

physical aspect of a person's present life, sound, can cause a traumatised person to relive their experience.

In the above extract O'Connor's body exhibits physical signs similar to those, as discussed in the previous chapter, depicted by Private Friel following his injury in *Return of the Brute*: '[Friel] threw out his right leg and tapped the ground violently with his heel'.<sup>1</sup>

O'Connor is unable to hold his body steady, as he is powerless to prevent the images from France invading his mind. Therefore, the distinction between a peacetime location in rural Ireland and the battlefield becomes blurred. This occurs again moments later, but here the physical symptoms are heightened as the intensity of the episode increases:

[O'Connor's] whole body trembled. Beads of cold sweat poured through his forehead and neck. With an oath he shot out his hands and made for the door. He felt sure that he would be dead before he reached the open air. The round ball in his stomach was stifling him [...] A squall came from the south over the crags. It came with a swoop. He gasped and his eyeballs started. As he ran headlong forward, fantastic visions crowded into his mind. He saw millions of dying men, worlds falling to pieces, continents hurled into the air, while he himself wandered among the chaos, the only living atom in a wrecked universe. He ran faster, trying to escape the vision [...] Over all came the noise of the guns, millions of guns, rising and falling and intermingling. Their sound was like a millrace. It made beautiful music that enthralled him and made him want to kill [...] His brain began to expand. It covered the earth and then the universe, and then it burst hurting his forehead. (64-65)

O'Flaherty here expresses a detailed description of a psychotic episode at the heart of which is wartime experience: the 'wounded [and] the noise of guns' are obvious allusions to the Great War, while O'Flaherty's reference to 'skulls [and] fetid smells' are descriptions that reoccur in numerous war texts.

In this passage Liam O'Flaherty conveys a sense of physicality to the reader, expressing the toll such an experience must take upon the person's body. O'Connor's visions of the war are disjointed and gruesome. Short phrases indicate changes in thought as images rush into and, just as quickly, out of the protagonist's mind. The speed with which the

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<sup>1</sup> Liam O'Flaherty, *Return of the Brute*, p. 122.

imagery changes provides a sense of the lack of control a sufferer may experience. As has been discussed in the relation to *Return of the Brute*, Liam O'Flaherty depicted Private Gunn's episodes very much like he had experienced them on the battlefield. Here again in *The Black Soul* the body is used to convey a sense of these hallucinations; indeed, the imagery is identical even though the context is peacetime. This is a mode of representing trauma, apparent through detailing specific symptoms, not found in the texts of the officer writers in whose texts there is a paucity of such descriptions. Of further importance is that such a portrayal occurs within a peacetime environment, as the border between wartime and homecoming becomes, in O'Flaherty's text, porous.

Also significant in Liam O'Flaherty's portrayal of trauma in *The Black Soul* is the notion that the suffering brought about by such a condition, as noted previously, was initially categorised along class lines, with the neurasthenia of officers manifesting itself mentally while the hysteria of men in the ranks physical. If one considers Virginia Woolf's depiction of a neurasthenic officer, Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), it is possible to clearly note the delineation of such symptoms. As Septimus and his wife Reiza walked in the park, 'the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans!'<sup>1</sup> Woolf's portrayal of Septimus Smith depicts the hallucinations many individuals suffered, here following the sight of Smith's dead officer friend, Evans. Mark Hussey, referred to by Michael Whitworth in his *Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway*, notes that Smith experiences symptoms of neurasthenia and moreover, the use of phrases such as 'he [Smith] could not feel' and, upon the death of his friend Evans, '[Septimus] congratulated himself upon feeling very little' then, as Hussey noted, '[t]hroughout the novel, Septimus is largely unaware of his body as it appears to others in the world'.<sup>2</sup> Michael Whitworth comments that '[b]eing

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 95 and Mark Hussey, *The Singing of the Real World* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986), p. 14 quoted in Michael H. Whitworth, *Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway* (London: MacMillan Palgrave, 2015), p. 69.

unembodied [Septimus] can avoid facing up to Evans's death'. As such the notion that officers symptoms are not physical is taken to its ultimate conclusion as the neurasthenic officer creates 'a fantasy world'<sup>1</sup> in order to cope with his wartime experiences.

In *The Black Soul*, the mental problems of Fergus O'Connor, however, as a private in the ranks, predominantly manifest themselves through physical symptoms: O'Connor's 'whole body [would] 'tremble' while 'sweat poured through his forehead and neck' and his '[brain would] throb' (30). Vitally, the extent to which O'Connor's manifestation of his trauma was sensory can be expressed in the phrase '[O'Connor] felt' (29). As can be noted, in both extracts relating to Fergus O'Connor there are references to sight, hearing or touch - the physicality of which stands in opposition to the disembodied state of an officer such as Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith, who 'could not feel'.

In order to convey such an illness in *The Black Soul*, Liam O'Flaherty's language arguably becomes expressionist in style and, in so doing, this assists the author in highlighting the effects of the war, as the symptoms are portrayed through O'Connor's senses in a manner with which many readers may have been able to identify. Indeed one can perhaps begin to understand what veterans suffer through a portrayal of the illness by an author suffering from it himself. The wartime imagery in the above extracts from *The Black Soul* are carefully juxtaposed against an ordinariness; the sound of 'the sea rolling', a 'cormorant [...] swishing wings' or a 'squall', are all accompanied by 'fantastic visions'. The interjection of such disjunctive, and fragmented, images heightens their disturbing effect, thereby reinforcing the unsettling wartime pictures O'Connor recalls.

The lack of a discernible relationship between the trigger image provided by nature and the traumatic memory it raises creates a sense of fragmentation within sections of the text, which further serves to heighten the distress experienced by O'Connor. It is argued that,

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<sup>1</sup> Michael H. Whitworth, *Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway*, p. 69.

in *The Black Soul*, O'Flaherty portrays a complex relationship between mind and body which, to an extent, undermines the binary position of an officer's symptoms being cerebral while a working class soldier betrays those that are physical. Medical men such as Doctors Myers and Rivers, as discussed in the previous chapter, presented the view that there was such a clear differentiation between mental and physical symptoms. Yet Liam O'Flaherty portrays both manifestations of the illness through the body and instances of hallucinations; after all, O'Connor is described as '[seeing] millions of dying men' on Inverrara. *The Black Soul* does provide a better and more complete picture of the bodily impact of trauma, and does so in a less clearly delineated manner than has been considered by men such as Myers. O'Flaherty's portrayal of trauma is rather more nuanced, as he depicts within a working-class man the interweaving of physical and psychological symptoms.

O'Flaherty shows, through O'Connor's war-induced trauma, the ongoing impact of the character's brush with the chaos that is modernity, particularly the technology of war and the urban environment of Dublin. In *The Black Soul* the First World War is seen to be a conflict with weapons powerful enough to cause a soldier such as O'Connor to remember that he was wholly 'buried by a shell in France' (63). The idea of trauma is extended onto the streets of Dublin in which, following the Armistice, '[t]he tramcars sounded in [O'Connor's] ears that evening as he rushed away from the doctor's as loud as an artillery barrage' (48). The ex-soldier is in Dublin visiting a doctor due to the invasion into his mind of wartime memories, which find expression in the sounds of the metropolis such that the doctor told O'Connor to 'go out to the west' (48). O'Connor is presented as escaping the immediacy and sensory assault and overload of urban modernity in order to deal with the ramifications of his wartime experiences.

The doctor's advice for Fergus O'Connor to go to the west of Ireland opens up a consideration of the semi-peripheral relationship of the Aran Island, in which one can note a

sense of 'primitivism', as against the modernity of Dublin, the later portrayed in a work of literary modernism such as James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Desmond Harding in his *Writing the City: Urban Visions and Literary Modernism* described how, in *Ulysses*, Joyce portrays Dublin as 'the quintessential literary city of modernism'.<sup>1</sup> Joyce's Dublin is a synthesis of multiple urban visions: it is simultaneously the capital of Ireland, it functions geographically, historically and culturally as a European city.

Dublin's place as an important urban centre was despite its size. In 1904, the year portrayed in *Ulysses*, Dublin had a population of 300,000 which was, as Robert Alter stated in his *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel*, 'twentieth the size of London at this time'.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of Dublin being a small city there is portrayed in *Ulysses*:

the bustle of traffic and pedestrians, the barrage of advertising (Bloom's trade, of course), the ubiquity of print journalism, underpinned by telegraphic linkage with the wider world (news of a maritime disaster in New York is bruited about), the presence of sundry arrivals from abroad, make this Dublin feel, despite its relatively small size, like a big modern city.<sup>3</sup>

Trams, ever present in Joyce's novel, are needed to transport individuals around the city and into the outer residential reaches of Dublin. This produces a sense of motion within the text which contributes, as Robert Alter noted, '[to] a constant process of transformation [...] Buildings, whole neighborhoods go up, come down, go up again'.<sup>4</sup> In Joyce's Dublin, it can be suggested, Leopold Bloom is portrayed as feeling a loss of agency as the modern European city in which he lives is constantly moving, changing, developing in order to remain modern and in touch with the world which is in contrast to Liam O'Flaherty's depiction of the Aran island.

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<sup>1</sup> Desmond Harding, *Writing the City: Urban Visions and Literary Modernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.129.

Located off the west coast of Ireland Aran is physically on the periphery of both the Irish mainland and of Europe. Liam O’Flaherty depicts the inhabitants - who in the main are peasants - as outside of modernity, apparent, for example, through their adherence to a yearly cycle predicated upon the seasons. A reader of *The Black Soul* is made aware of this very notion even before the narrative begins as the contents page reveals that the text has four sections: ‘Winter, Spring, Summer, Autumn’.<sup>1</sup> The islander’s lives are dictated to by the seasons. A phrase repeated throughout the first section is presented in the novel’s first sentence as O’Flaherty expresses the reality that ‘[i]n Winter all things die’ (TBS/13). As such the peasants hunker down in their cottages and await the arrival of better times: ‘Old men sitting by the fires in their cabins shivered and felt that their death was near’ (14). These islanders exist in a primitive state, close to, and ruled by, the earth.

Marianna Torgovnick in her *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* defines the study of the primitive in the following way: ‘To study the primitive is thus to enter an exotic world [...] Primitives are our untainted selves, our id forces – libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous. Primitives are mystics, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies. Primitives are free’.<sup>2</sup> This definition, it can be suggested, is applicable to Liam O’Flaherty’s portrayal of the peasants in *The Black Soul* because O’Flaherty depicts them to be ‘in tune with nature’. Upon the arrival of spring there was ‘[l]ife, life, life [...] from dawn to dark the people hurried excitedly opening the earth to sow’ (TBS/117). In Summer ‘[t]he men watched their crops growing’ (175) and then in Autumn ‘[t]he men rooted up the earth avariciously with their spades to gather the fruit that had matured in its womb during the heat of summer’ (223). This connection with nature is but one example of O’Flaherty’s portrayal of the primitivism of the author’s fictional Aran island and stands in contrast to ‘the bustle’ of

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<sup>1</sup> Liam O’Flaherty, *The Black Soul*, Contents page.

<sup>2</sup> Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 8.

the Dublin's modernity that Joyce depicted in *Ulysses*. Later in the chapter another aspect of the primitive will be discussed - the paganism of Little Mary - which stands in contrast to the Roman Catholicism of Kathleen O'Daly. The significance for 'the Stranger' of the semi-peripheral nature of the islands, and the unchanging traditions of its inhabitants, lies, as will become apparent later in the chapter, in the opportunity for healing this part of rural Ireland offered to the veteran as O'Connor is gradually able to overcome his war-induced trauma.

The subjective perspective of Fergus O'Connor, reflected in the expressionist tinge of O'Flaherty's imagery, is in turn portrayed by the peasants who view the ex-soldier as exhibiting strange behaviour: 'They said that the doctors had told him to come to Inverara as a cure for his nerves [...] They said too that he was mad, and had no religion', (24) furthermore, 'he is mad from the wars' (43) while, later in the novel, it is noted how 'they all thought [O'Connor was] possessed of a devil' (51). However, despite O'Flaherty's repeated use of the third person personal pronoun, there are some islanders who exhibit a more understanding view: 'They say he was badly wounded in the big war. What a pity!' (135) Also significant for this discussion is the fact that the peasants of Inverara are opened-minded about O'Connor's involvement in the conflict unlike, as will become apparent, an individual with nationalist views who castigates O'Connor for his military service.

Liam O'Flaherty's portrayal of trauma in *The Black Soul*, it is argued, challenges assumptions advanced during and just after the First World War by medical personnel, as predicated in the main upon ideas of class, recording whether one would display physical or psychological symptoms. Although the First World War brought about a softening in class based attitudes to those who suffered with war-induced trauma, there continued to be within medical circles, into the inter-war years, a differentiation in the labelling of symptoms predicated upon the sufferer's social standing. As Jason Crouthamel and Peter Leese stated in their *Psychological Trauma and the Legacies of the First World War*:



[d]octors tried to assert their authority in maintaining class hierarchies by characterizing ‘war hysteria’ as emblematic of working class mental and physical inferiority. Scholars dealing with shell shock have pointed to evidence that the hysteria diagnosis was often determined by social class, as middle class doctors reserved a less stigmatizing ‘neurasthenia’ or ‘exhaustion’ diagnosis for middle-class officers, while working-class men, whose bodies and minds were perceived to be inferior, received the label ‘war hysterics’ from prejudiced doctors’.<sup>1</sup>

What Crouthamel and Leese suggests in this passage is similar to that discussed earlier in the thesis in relation to the work of Elaine Showalter and O’Flaherty’s *Return of the Brute*.

Showalter, in her *The Female Malady*, also noted how there was a differentiation of symptoms of war-induced trauma predicated upon one’s place within the military, and therefore by extension, one’s social status: officers were ‘neurasthenic’, men in the ranks ‘hysteric’.<sup>2</sup> Liam O’Flaherty’s novel is significant because his depiction of trauma is not so binary. In *The Black Soul* Liam O’Flaherty portrays an interconnected relationship between mind and body, as he did to a lesser extent in *Return of the Brute*; both mental manifestations, in the form of hallucinations, and bodily symptoms of war-induced trauma, are displayed by Fergus O’Connor. In so doing the author, presents a perspective upon the illness as informed by the legacy of his own wartime experiences, articulating what was a constant psychological battle with that ‘bursting [shell]’.

### **A Stranger In One’s Own Country**

Despite the relative sympathy of at least one of the peasants for O’Connor, he is not one of them. Thus the story of his return reflects historical divisions in Ireland that crystallised around this sense of the soldiers returning from British service. One aspect of Fergus O’Connor that needs to be considered is the sobriquet attributed to him by O’Flaherty: ‘the Stranger’. In a letter to Edward Garnett, dated August 1923, O’Flaherty wrote: ‘I am going to make O’Daly my father with certain changes, and foist myself into my mother’s people,

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<sup>1</sup> Jason Crouthamel and Peter Leese, ‘Introduction’ in *Psychological Trauma and the Legacies of the First World War* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature, Springer International Publishing AG, 2017), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 174.

that is, of course, the Stranger'.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, as has been noted, O'Flaherty viewed O'Connor as including elements of himself. Yet it is intriguing that he chose to use a capital letter in the term 'the Stranger'. In so doing, it is argued, O'Flaherty connects with an Irish literary tradition begun in the sixteenth-century in which English, Anglo-Irish and then Irish travel writers depicted Ireland in defamiliarised terms; here with a particular resonance in being applied to a returning soldier.

Constantia Maxwell, in her *The Stranger in Ireland: From the Reign of Elizabeth to the Great Famine* (1954), republished a collection of essays by writers such as Edmund Spencer, Sir John Carr and William Makepeace Thackeray in which Englishmen write of Ireland as a country, although part of Britain, which is strange to them, and in which, in turn, they are strangers. As Melissa Fagan states in her 'Isn't it your own country?': The Stranger in Nineteenth-century Irish Literature', initially travel writers were English, but over time such texts began to be written by Irishmen. As these writers travelled through their own country, however, they were mistaken by many for Englishmen:

The fact that one Irishman could not recognise another indicates the gulf between the classes in Ireland, and the possibility that upper-class Irish suffered culture shock as much as their English counterparts [...] must have been profoundly disturbing for the Irish writer, who finds himself a stranger in his own land – particularly as that land has a habit of figuring the stranger as English.<sup>2</sup>

Fagan goes on to describe how a literary counter movement emerged against the figure of 'the stranger', beginning with the nineteenth-century Irish poet Thomas Moore and his poem 'Let Erin Remember the Days of Old':

Let Erin remember the days of old,  
Ere her faithless sons betray'd her;  
When Malachi wore the collar of gold,  
Which he won from her proud invader,  
When her kings, with standards of green unfurl'd,  
Led the Red-Branch Knights to danger;-  
Ere the emerald gem of the western world

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<sup>1</sup> Liam O'Flaherty in *The Letters of Liam O'Flaherty*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Melissa Fagan, 'Isn't it your own country?': The Stranger in Nineteenth-Century Irish Literature' in *The Yearbook of English Studies* Vol. 34, Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing (2004), p. 37.

Was set in the crown of a stranger.<sup>1</sup>

W.B. Yeats, in his play 'Cathleen ni Houlihan' expresses a similar sentiment. The character Cathleen, a traditional personification of Ireland, calls to Irish men to help her reclaim her four fields, symbolising the four provinces of Ireland. Cathleen, when asked, 'What was it put you astray?'; replies 'Too many strangers in the house'.<sup>2</sup> James Joyce, in his novel *Ulysses*, similarly refers to this line from Yeats when Stephen Dedalus, upset by the Englishmen Haines, who is displacing him both from home and Buck Mulligan, exclaims: 'Gaptoothed Kathleen, her four beautiful green fields, the stranger in the house [...] We feel in England. Penitent thief. Gone'.<sup>3</sup>

The notion implicit in all three of these extracts is that of removing Britain from Ireland likewise in *The Black Soul* the title the author attributes to Fergus O'Connor has an added resonance, with O'Flaherty positing the view that, as a soldier having served in the British army, O'Connor could now be viewed as a 'Stranger' to Ireland in the tradition of the Englishman of earlier times. Although O'Connor is also known as 'the Stranger' he is, as will become apparent, portrayed by O'Flaherty as a man connected to Ireland's ancient martial history. In so doing the author is highlighting the doubleness of attitudes to serving Irishmen, uneasily voicing positions reflective of both those who supported men such as O'Connor and individuals who perceived that, by his enlistment, he had become '[a] Stranger' to Ireland, a foreigner to their nation.

In *The Black Soul*, the character John O'Daly, a retired magistrate, knows Fergus O'Connor's Irish heritage and claims him despite his wartime service: 'your father was one of the old tribe, one of ourselves. I know ye got good blood in you' (150). However,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Moore, 'Let Erin Remember the Days of Old' in *Field Day Anthology*, ed. by Seamus Deane (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), lines 1-8, p. 1061. Only the poem's title is mentioned in Fagan's essay.

<sup>2</sup> W. B. Yeats, 'Cathleen ni Houlihan' in *W.B. Yeats: Selected Plays*, ed. by A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 250.

<sup>3</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 177 and 179.

Kathleen O'Daly, his daughter, a teacher, Irish republican and love interest to O'Connor, views his military activities in a different light:

"You have been in the British army and therefore you are an enemy of your country," since she, like all cultured young Irish women, was a Nationalist for the same reason that similar types in other countries are suffragettes or followers of nature-cults or social reformers, to express their newly discovered sex freedom. She said, "You are a pariah since you have lost your religion," for as a cultured young Irish woman, the Christian religion was to her an emblem of purity, sex freedom, and a bulwark against everything gross and foreign. And the Stranger, even though his reason despised both Nationalism and Christianity as relics of the childhood of human thought, felt himself in the position of a man accused by his own family of heinous crimes against the family honour. (109)

As mentioned earlier Liam O'Flaherty was 'regarded as a pariah' by some of those he knew within Ireland. This is a term he applies to 'the Stranger' through Kathleen O'Daly, a woman in whose name, and characterisation, two subjects intertwine: Irish Nationalism and Roman Catholicism. As mentioned earlier, Cathleen Ni Houlihan is a mythical symbol and an emblem of Irishness within literature. This choice of name implies that O'Flaherty's character stands in a similar role, in opposition to the pagan Little Mary, Red John's wife and a woman whom the reader is made privy to her thoughts: 'Virgin Mary', she kept saying, 'what is coming over me? 'I love him [O'Connor], I love him' (41). There is a degree of irony both in the name O'Flaherty gives her, given its biblical connotation, and the fact that, as a pagan, Little Mary communes with a figure central to the Roman Catholic religion, the mother of Christ.

Significantly the term 'pariah', in the context of the extract above, connects with a loss of religion as well as the notion that O'Connor is an 'enemy' of Ireland. This term is one laden with significance because, it can be suggested, at the time of *The Black Soul's* publication in Ireland during 1924, for many, the word 'enemy' would have been associated with those against whom many Nationalists may have fought - such as in the 1916 Easter Rising, the War of Independence and/or the Irish Civil War. The literary depiction of a return to Ireland of a man such as Fergus O'Connor was, in the context of recent Irish history and its

own conflicts at the time of publication, a contentious one. Indeed, phrases such as ‘enemy of your country’ clearly take on added meaning. Nationalists such as Kathleen O’Daly could view someone like O’Connor as an enemy due to his wartime actions but also, subsequently, because of Ireland’s domestic conflicts and division. Thus for a man such as O’Connor, it is argued, to label him as an enemy could be viewed as undermining, indeed negating, the hardships and brutality men such as he experienced in the trenches, not least through its association with the side against whom ‘the Stranger’ had been fighting.

To Nationalists O’Connor has become ‘foreign’ and is to be viewed as akin to a Briton, another ‘stranger in the house’, to paraphrase Yeats’ ‘Cathleen ni Houlihan’. To counter Kathleen’s position as outlined in the extract above, ‘the Stranger’ resorts to misogyny, as though Kathleen’s views are just something based upon her gender and a misplaced quest for emancipation, rather than as a valid political position. O’Connor, within and for himself, still clearly identifies with Ireland instead of being merely a foreigner. This is because, as the omniscient narrator outlines, ‘the Stranger’ felt that his rejection of both ‘Nationalism and Christianity’ was nonetheless ‘[a] heinous crime against the family honour’ (109).

O’Flaherty uses O’Connor to criticise Ireland and what the author viewed to be many in the country’s slavish adherence to nationalism and religion. The fact that O’Connor is an ex-British soldier, but also a lapsed Roman Catholic, places the character simultaneously within yet outside the two interconnected core elements espoused by Kathleen: nationalism and religion. In so doing O’Flaherty has created a complex figure whose opposition to the unflinching nationalism of Kathleen O’Daly is predicated upon experience of exclusion in relation to an inflexible institution, as he perceives the Irish Catholic church, which the author views from the outside, at least, in part due to his isolating involvement with the British and the First World War. Here one can see a distancing on the part of the Irish soldier, not from

the ideological ethos of the British war, but from Irish institutions through the experience of war. O'Connor simultaneously feels the censure of his fellow Irishmen and women, however, and understands the strain on the family honour that this involvement in this conflict has caused.

### **Irish Mythology**

There are two Irelands, the urban and the rural, presented in the war texts of the Irish soldier-writers but, it is suggested, it is the latter - with its traditions and mythology unchanged over generations - from which MacGill and O'Flaherty draw comfort, despite the ambivalences and tensions identified above. Following a traumatic episode experienced by 'the Stranger', as O'Connor lies ill in bed, Little Mary uses a charm, given to her by her mother, in order to bring the ex-soldier back to consciousness:

She filled a cup with water and laid it on a chair beside the bed. Then she pressed the charm to her heart and kissed it. It was a square flat piece of yellowish stone covered with inscriptions, supposed to be written in Ogham Craombh, the old Druidic writing. Her mother had told her that the charm itself had originally been given to a Firbolg princess as the price of her love by a Tuatha De Danaan warrior, and that it had the power to save its owner's lover from death or the designs of the devil [...] Three times she dipped the stone in the water and three times she pressed it to the Stranger's lips, praying to Crom. And strangely enough, after the third pressure he stirred, then turned on his side and opened his eyes. (72)

This is the first of two instances in *The Black Soul* portraying a link between Irish mythology and 'the Stranger's' war induced trauma. O'Flaherty's attribution of the name Mary in the context of *The Black Soul* is, it is suggested, here ironic. Rather than using Roman Catholic ritual or prayers, as might be traditionally expected from such a name, she uses paganism, praying to 'Crom', an Irish god who pre-dated Saint Patrick, in order to return O'Connor to health. In so doing, it is suggested, Mary can be viewed as being what Marianna Torgovnick defined earlier as 'primitive' because in addition to being 'in tune with nature', as this passage demonstrates, Little Mary is also a 'mystic[s]'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*, p. 8.

O'Flaherty's connection of Mary with paganism further suggests a connection between this work and the construction of Irish identity fostered by the Irish Literary Revival, particularly J. M. Synge whose writing, as Edward Hirsch argues in his 'Imaginary Peasant', 'romanticize[d] the naturalness, paganism, and rich linguistic plenitude of Irish peasant life'.<sup>1</sup> In his 1904 play 'Riders to the Sea', Synge includes references to the pagan beliefs of Irish peasants. At the play's close, the character Maurya mentions 'getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain': 'Holy Water', in the Roman Catholic religion, is that which has been blessed by a priest, while 'Samhain' is a pagan holiday marking harvest season. Further, the 'keening' (*Caoineadh*), earlier referred to in *The Black Soul*, also takes place in Synge's play in relation to the death of the character Bartley. It is an aspect of pagan ritual that the peasants of Ireland continued, even in connection with a Catholic burial. As Christopher Collins outlines in his 'The Cries of Pagan Desperation: Synge, Riders to the Sea and the Discontents of Historical Time':

*Caoineadh* holds its provenance within the *nosad* (funeral rites) of the *Teamhur Feis* (Rites of Tara). The *nosad* of *Teamhur Feis* were conducted by the Arch Druid of Ireland of the burial of the deceased High King of Ireland. St. Patrick usurped the *Teamhur Feis* in 433 A.D. [...] However, *Caoineadh* persisted [...] through the ancient Saga texts [and] into Synge's play.<sup>2</sup>

Liam O'Flaherty extends these references to paganism in *The Black Soul* from Mary to the peasant women who, following the death of Mary's husband, Red John, accompanies the body: 'a weird song was carried to them on the wind [...] their voices rising and falling mournfully through the changing rush of the wind' (TBS/255). O'Connor's simultaneous intimacy with and newly felt distance from Mary and the peasantry of the island is also connected to the distancing that his period of exile and military service has affected clearly brought about. This relationship reflects O'Flaherty's own ambivalence about the peasantry,

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Hirsch, 'The Imaginary Peasant' in *PMLA* (Vol.106 No. 5 October 1991), p. 1127.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Collins, 'The Cries of Pagan Desperation: Synge, Riders to the Sea and the Discontents of Historical Time', p. 10 online at: <http://www.academia.edu> [Accessed 16/02/2017].

and perhaps his uneasy position as a writer representing the oral traditions and superstitions of the people among whom he originated, as well as developing strategies to resist the temptation to make his peasantry ‘picturesque’.

O’Flaherty’s reference to ‘Ogham’, in the extended extract above concerning Mary’s pagan ritual, is a form of writing used in Old Irish on stone inscriptions, between the fourth and sixth century A.D., and then on manuscripts from the sixth to the ninth centuries. It is believed to have been used as a secret form of communication. Indeed, while Irish mythology identifies the Tuath De Danaan as a race of supernaturally gifted people who are believed to represent the main deities of pre-Christian Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Christian monks recorded much of Irish mythology and they depicted the Tuath De as kings, queens and heroes of the distant past. The Tuath De king, Nuada, led an army at the First Battle of Magh Tuireadh on the Irish west coast, in which they defeated and displaced the native Firbolg. O’Flaherty, whose knowledge of Irish mythology is evidenced by its inclusion in *The Back Soul* - and in the many texts he wrote in his native language, Gaelic – goes further in his connection to home than either Patrick MacGill or James Hanley. Unlike the latter two authors, O’Flaherty roots his novel, and its attendant message of hope, in an ancient Irish mythology. MacGill and Hanley’s notion of home is taken to be the place of one’s birth. O’Flaherty, by contrast, not only also uses this idea, but he extends such a notion by situating ‘the Stranger’s’ experiences in a place that can be viewed, by those such as the Revivalists, as assisting the formation of an independent country now referred to as Ireland. This is further evidence of O’Flaherty’s complex relationship to his home: there is a degree of rejection of the working class peasants; for instance, he shows them to be less than ‘ideal’, to use Synge’s word. On one occasion in the novel, for example, O’Flaherty portrays how, following a storm in which a ‘Norwegian barque’ was wrecked on the coast, O’Connor watches ‘[the] peasants of

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Ogham’, <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/ogham.htm> [Accessed 22/03/2015].



Rooruck quarrelling on the shore [...] the living looting the house of the dead' (TBS/44).

However, O'Flaherty does recognise the significance of older belief systems, that pre-date Christianity, and gives them respectfully close representation.

Liam O'Flaherty portrays O'Connor as seeking healing for war trauma through a combination of Irish mythology and the nature of Inverara. Initially, nature in the winter is depicted as a malevolent force: 'Death, death, death, and drear winds blowing around frozen dead hearts' (67). There is a sense of violence on Inverara represented by both the winter storms, in a 'battle' against nature, and the mythological past, those 'enemies' who pursued the early Irish. Again O'Flaherty uses military imagery to emphasise his overarching portrayal of the Stranger's illness. In so doing he conveys, it is suggested, a notion of historical continuity. The island has existed for aeons and the brutal and destructive nature of winter it experiences is similar to that of age-old battle. As discussed in the previous chapter, nature on the battlefield is an element against which the soldiers must on occasion battle, as is the case on Inverara.

As spring arrives so 'the Stranger' begins to slowly to recover. The larks arrive on the island and '[t]heir voices rang out clear and defiant as they soared high over Inverara' (116). This is in complete contrast to the larks depicted in *Return of the Brute*, where soldiers are portrayed '[with] their eyes narrowed [as] they listened to the eerie singing of the lark in No Man's Land'.<sup>1</sup> The image of the lark in war-writing is by now clichéd, with officer-writers often referring their call and associating it with beauty and freedom. Yet in O'Flaherty's novel the image is unexpected. In *Return of the Brute* O'Flaherty reinforces the lack of freedom experienced by the working-class soldiers through the 'eerie' call of the lark. In *The Black Soul*, however, a notion of hope is reinstituted in the lark's song; a sense of re-birth connected not only to the island, as it emerges from the ravages of winter, but also to

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<sup>1</sup> Liam O'Flaherty, *Return of the Brute*, p. 112.

‘the Stranger’ himself. Ultimately, O’Flaherty, in the avatar of this troubled character, finds more to identify with than resist in these elements of Irish culture.

On another occasion, as O’Connor is walking around the island, he visits ‘Coillnamham Fort’ (TBS/67), a structure that had been built by ‘prehistoric warriors’ (158). What is significant about this structure is that such a place does still exist:

[It is a] huge stone fort perched on a cliff 200 feet above the sea on the south-west coast of Inishmore, the largest of the Aran Islands. The fort, often described as one of the most magnificent structures of its kind in Western Europe, covers about 11 acres and comprises three concentric semicircles. The middle wall is covered by an abatis (or *chevaux-de-frise*) of jagged limestone uprights [...] According to the Lebor Gabála [Book of Invasions], the Fir Bolg built Dún Aonghusa and other stone forts on Aran Island; one of their chiefs, Angus (Aonghus, etc.), gives his name to the structure. It is also the last refuge of the Fomorians [...] it is called Coillnamhan Fort in the fiction.<sup>1</sup>

O’Flaherty, while locating the novel on an ostensibly fictionalised island, connects the narrative with Irish folklore, a mythology that does have a tangible presence. ‘The Stranger’ is depicted as having ‘passed through the [fort’s] two outer walls’ (158) and entered the centre of Coillnamham Fort, a place ‘trodden by savage warriors three thousand years before [...] He felt like a monk who sits in a vast empty cathedral communing with his god’ (158-159). On the one hand intellect had destroyed the notion of God for ‘the Stranger’ - ‘[he] wanted to find something tremendous and binding, whose meaning he would be afraid to question, something that he could accept blindly, like Catholics accept the Pope’ (186) - yet on the other, he is portrayed as actually drawing comfort from the Irish fighters of the past. O’Connor has found a belief system that allows him to draw a spiritual comfort similar to, and yet different from, that of Irish Catholicism: the heritage of the warrior. What has emerged from the previous discussions of texts by Patrick MacGill and James Hanley has been the image of the Irish warrior, the similarity in physical appearance and martial attitude.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Dun Aonghusa’ in *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* <http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view> [Accessed 21/03/2015].

In *The Black Soul* this sense of camaraderie between soldiers extends not just to men of different regiments, as in MacGill and Hanley, but to different historical periods.

One can also draw a second insight from O'Flaherty's depiction of O'Connor 'communing with his god', as the latter is being presented with the lineage of Irish warriors, situated as he is amongst the men who fought for the land that became Ireland. Through his portrayal of this link, O'Flaherty undermines those in Ireland who should view him, and all of the Irishmen who fought in the First World War, as 'pariah[s]'. Veterans such as the author, and O'Connor, were not 'Strangers', for Irishmen have been fighting in wars for centuries. It is recognised, furthermore, that the 'savage warriors' of Coillnamham Fort were specifically fighting on what would become Irish soil. Yet, it is suggested here, in the figure of 'the Stranger' there is depicted the notion of trans-national camaraderie evident in the works of Patrick MacGill and James Hanley. In *The Black Soul* O'Flaherty uses the term 'the Stranger' in an ironic manner: the author, it is argued, posits the notion that O'Connor is a stranger to those who do not themselves understand the history of Ireland, one in which men have fought over the years and for whom a bond is predicated not in whose army one was a soldier, but whether or not one could be viewed as a 'warrior'. Ironically, then, it is in Irish warrior culture that O'Flaherty finds the aesthetic means to reconcile his roles as soldier for the British and Irish in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, turning the idea of Great War combat into a universal that transcends the political oppositions represented in these different forms of military action.

It is through his connection to Coillnamham Fort that 'the Stranger' began to overcome his trauma, a process aided by what he is able to see of the island from that vantage point:

White sheep, followed by their frisking lambs, wandered about the crags. Women in red petticoats crossed here and there with cans to milk their cows. The cows lowed. A pattering sound came from afar of somebody knocking a heap of smooth stones and a horse whinnied near there, eager for her evening drink of water perhaps. He gazed in

silence, drinking in the beauty of nature. He wanted to embrace it, to hold it to his breast. Nature seemed to say, "See how beautiful is the world. Fool. You despise peasants, do you? You think you are an intellectual? I'll tell you what you are. You are a charlatan. Go back now to the woman that loves you and enjoy life. It is good, but only to those who prefer truth to cheap cynicism and intellectual piffle." And the ghosts of dead warriors seemed to clash their battle-axes silently on their shields and murmur, "Aye, that is truth" (159-160).

There was nothing eternal but the sea. "Ah, beautiful fierce sea", he cried aloud, as if he were speaking to a mistress, "you are immortal. You have real life, unchanging life." And just as one morning in Canada when he had seen the reflection of a vast pine forest at dawn in the eastern sky, he had stood in awe, his imagination staggered, thinking that a new world had suddenly flickered across his mind. It flashed and then vanished, leaving wonder and awe behind it. (189)

In *The Black Soul*, intellectual civilisation is represented by the Catholicism and nationalism of Kathleen O'Daly that O'Connor dismisses in favour of nature and Irish paganism, with its attendant connection to mythology and primitivism, as embodied by Mary. As A.A. Kelly noted in her *Storyteller*: '[O'Flaherty] turns to nature as a source of spiritual richness and strength to salve unsatisfactory personal experiences ... [his] love of nature stems in part from his early environment, so that nature is emotionally connected with Aran and comes to be connected with the spirit of Ireland'.<sup>1</sup> As Liam O'Flaherty articulated in *Shame the Devil*: 'In [nature] lies your chance of regaining peace'.<sup>2</sup> What is significant about O'Flaherty's and Kelly's words is the meaning attributed to 'spirit' and 'peace'; that is, the notion that it is to Ireland that O'Flaherty returned after the war to find some form of rejuvenation following his trauma. This thesis' journey into war, as commenced with the Irishman Patrick MacGill in *The Amateur Army* finds its conclusion in Liam O'Flaherty's image of Fergus O'Connor, 'the Stranger': no longer a strange man in his country of birth, standing on the cliffs of Inverara, the most westerly point of Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> A.A. Kelly, *Storyteller*, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Liam O'Flaherty, *Shame the Devil*, p. 217.

## Conclusion

Liam O'Flaherty's *Return of the Brute* and *The Black Soul* fulfil a specific role in the more general purpose of this thesis. As Samuel Hynes noted in his *The Soldier's Tale*, 'the poor, inarticulate, unlettered shy' ordinary soldier in the ranks stands in stark contrast to the 'great self-recording [middle/upper] class'.<sup>1</sup> The latter produced the vast majority of writing that delineated the wider experiences of World War One, alongside noting, to a greater or lesser degree, their psychological reaction to the conflict in memoirs and diaries, as well as poems and prose. As Peter Barham outlined in his *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War*, in which he considers those ordinary men 'excluded from the rolls of honour', often forgotten due to their mental illnesses, many of the mass of soldiers from the ranks did write of their war, but only to 'official agencies such as the war pensions authorities' with whom many veterans had to fight to receive disability payments.<sup>2</sup>

Liam O'Flaherty's texts assist in advancing our understanding of the psychological impact of the First World War upon an Irish, working-class, Roman Catholic soldier in particular, and of soldiers more generally who suffered psychologically following their wartime experiences. It also offers a revealing treatment of the complex negotiations of identity faced by returning soldiers in O'Connor and O'Flaherty's position, whose homecoming saw them becoming a Stranger. This represents an aesthetic resolution, if not necessarily a political one, for the tensions faced by such individuals, and for a writer like O'Flaherty, constitutionally opposed to these pressures, yet exposed to and shaped by the twin pressures of Catholicism and Irish nationalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Barham, *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 7 and 9.

## Conclusion

Within the last decade, historical interest has arisen around the role Irishmen played in the British army during the First World War. With the centenary occurring, the part played by Irish regiments has been brought into the public's consciousness through references in newspaper articles, on radio, or television broadcasts – as well as through exhibitions, such as that curated by the National Library of Ireland in Dublin, entitled 'Portraits of the Invisible: faces of Irish men and women from WW1'. The gallantry displayed by military units who went into combat bearing names and insignia replete with Irish cultural significance have been celebrated and honoured, bringing to the fore an insight into the actions, and sufferings, of many combatants whose country of birth was Ireland.

There is, however, one area connected to the involvement of Irish men and women in the First World War that has received rather less attention: the literature written during, and from the experiences of, those who had been directly involved. There are a myriad of reasons as to why this might have been the case in the past; for example, the political situation in Ireland, from the moment Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, meant there were some Irish men and women who were vehemently opposed to anyone who enlisted. This sentiment was arguably strengthened by the manner in which members of the British army responded to the Easter Rising of 1916, not to mention its leaders in the days following its cessation. In the years that followed, it can be argued, the literature generated by the First World War was simply ignored due to political expediency.

A further explanation as to why any Irish war writing may have been overlooked may have been due to the large number of accounts by favoured sources - particularly those of officers such as Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden - whose memoirs have formed what Samuel Hynes calls the 'Myth of War'. Officers presented in print accounts of wartime experience that has come to represent, for many, *the* version of events on

the Western Front - one written from the perspective of English, Protestant officers for whom the conditions in which they served in the trenches were a complete rupture from the circumstances of their pre-war lives.

There were individuals from Ireland, however, who did write of their experiences in the First World War. The purpose of this thesis has been to explore the war writing of Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty. All were working-class, Roman Catholic Irishmen, who fought as infantrymen in France, all as privates. They collectively, it has been argued here, constitute a group of war writers distinct from that of the officers whose work is so familiar to an English readership. The literary work of these three men presents an alternative version of the conflict to that of the aforementioned officers. Yet this is not simply because they come from Ireland, or have Irish heritage. Another significant difference is that, for MacGill, Hanley and O'Flaherty, the war was not in some key respects a break from their pre-war lives. If one considers the two photographs presented in the opening pages of this thesis, then the sentiment of continuity between peacetime and wartime is perfectly captured; an idea also represented by the title of Dominic Behan's song, 'McAlpine's Fusiliers'. Men such as these three Irish soldier-writers experienced hardship, privation and brutality before adulthood and then, undertaking various forms of manual labour, were employed in conditions not far removed from the trenches in which they served and which coloured their experience of the war. If one considers a navvy such as Patrick MacGill, he worked digging trenches and railway cuttings with pick and shovel, using explosives and wearing clothing that marked him out as an itinerant labourer; a type of uniform. The two photographs in the introduction encapsulate this notion of continuity, a connection between peacetime and war experienced by not just Patrick MacGill, but also James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty.

The Irish writers did more than challenge this notion of rupture portrayed in the officers' texts. The works of MacGill, Hanley and O'Flaherty have been ordered in this thesis chronologically, from infantry training in England to the trenches of France - together with representations of the home front and merchant navy - culminating in the return home to Ireland of an Irishman who had fought in the British army. This arrangement was purposefully done in order to demonstrate, on the one hand, the broad connections Irish men and women had with the conflict. In so doing what has been presented in this thesis is work that depicted areas of the war that has received little, to no attention; for instance, stokers serving in the merchant navy or women cleaning the hospital ships. Crucially for this thesis, however, what has emerged has been the consideration of literary representations of the Irish working-class in these roles, and the concept of work in general – opening up the idea of army service as a form of labour. This allowed the writers to think about the class aspects of this service; about the treatment of the privates as akin to the exploitation of the worker in a European context - inflected at times by a colonialism - and about the ambivalent feelings of such soldiers towards their identity as a worker and a fighter. The literary depiction of Irishmen living, and fighting, in the trenches of France forms a large element of this thesis. These underrepresented areas generally, and the work of Irish women cleaners or merchant stokers specifically, have been brought to the fore here.

The Irish soldier-writers have included within their texts areas associated with the conflict that differ from those of officers such as Siegfried Sassoon or Robert Graves, both of whom were raised in upper-middle class environments. The working class sensibilities of each of the Irishmen emerges through their writing in a number of ways, not only in the roles each man describes. There is depicted within each of the three Irish soldier-writers a sense of physicality that manifests itself through the varied ideas of work. Whether individuals are portrayed digging trenches, uncovering dead bodies, cleaning ships in which body parts are



found, or stoking the furnaces of merchant vessels, there is, within the writing of MacGill, Hanley and O'Flaherty, a close focus upon the human form undertaking manual labour; an activity required of them in wartime as in the pre-war era as navvies or labourers on-board ships. This is simply not present in the officers' texts. In so doing the Irish writers present to their readers a sense of the class difference between the officers and the men. Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty, each in their own way, depict the minutiae of life in the trenches for working-class men. Yet simultaneously, there is a sense of commonality in these writers' experiences. All were privates and therefore were required to undertake physical roles, as detailed above, expected of an infantryman. Furthermore, James Hanley transposes this idea into arenas connected to the war, spaces other than the trenches: the home front and merchant ships.

Allied to this notion of physicality is these Irishmen's detailed portrayal of violence. Fighting was a fact of Patrick MacGill's early life; indeed, it was a facet from which he professed to gain pleasure, both as a participant and observer. However, once in the trenches, for infantrymen fighting, often for their very lives, was an aspect of their work. To be proficient with a bayonet was as important as had been his earlier ability to use a shovel in peacetime. The level and type of violence varies in the work of each of the three writers, from the close quarter combat of Patrick MacGill when in a fight in order to survive, to the sadistic torturing and killing of a prisoner in James Hanley; an act carried out, it has been argued, not for any military purpose, but to satisfy personal sexual desires.

Violence has also been portrayed as being enacted against individuals within the texts: the torpedoing of an unarmed merchant ship in which many maritime civilians were killed, or the vilification of an Irish conscientious objector as he is paraded in front of the public by members of the British army. What differentiates the Irish soldier-writers from their officers is not only the range of subject matter, such as the portrayal of civilians, but also the degree

and detail of violence depicted. British officers do present to their readers instances of death, but they do so in restrained and muted language, often reporting rather than describing; detailing as though a witness to, and not a full participant in, events. There is an element of the Irishmen's personal identity that is bound up in physicality, one in which work and violence are integral parts, and as such, this emerges in their work. This notion is, on the one hand, troubling because it connects with pugilistic stereotypes of Irish men. However, as has been demonstrated, for men such as Patrick MacGill, fighting was a genuine aspect of their working-class lives, a facet of existence that was extended by Liam O'Flaherty to include warriors from Ireland's ancient past. Thus, an extra layer of continuity between peacetime and present has been identified: the martial qualities of Irish soldiers, such as those Liam O'Flaherty alluded to in his short story 'The Alien Skull', whereby a Private Mulhall was chosen for a mission because of his fighting ability.

A corollary to wartime violence is often death, an aspect of the First World War depicted in detail by the three Irishmen, from the aftermath of battle in Patrick MacGill - who describes at various times the bodies of decomposing soldiers, a battlefield littered with body parts - to the almost photographic quality of Liam O'Flaherty's portrayal of a wounded man dying. These Irish writers often portray death as an aspect of work, be that MacGill as a stretcher-bearer, Hanley depicting women cleaning a hospital ship and finding an amputated limb, or the aid given to a mortally wounded comrade. There is depicted a level of detail in these works that is not apparent in the officers who, as mentioned above, are restrained in their descriptions of the dead and dying, preferring instead to report the occurrence of such an event rather than portray them graphically, as do each of the three Irish soldier-writers.

If death is a frequent corollary to wartime violence then a consequence of both, to many who served in the trenches, was what has been termed in this thesis as 'war-induced trauma'. Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves both described in their memoirs experiencing

episodes of this illness, although each man did so briefly. Patrick MacGill depicted a traumatised soldier briefly evading his duty during a battle. Liam O'Flaherty, however, who suffered from this condition all of his later life, described in detail symptoms of war-induced trauma in combat as well as its impact upon an ex-soldier following his return to Ireland. What is significant about O'Flaherty's treatment of this subject is not only the detail in which it is portrayed, but the extent to which his texts also challenge the established notions of such an illness - specifically that officers predominantly suffered psychological symptoms, while working-class soldiers more frequently exhibited physical manifestations of trauma. O'Flaherty's writing combines descriptions of symptoms of the mind with the somatic showing the complex interaction of the two in a manner that went beyond medical opinions in the 1920s, the decade in which the Irishman's texts were published.

Each of these three writers, to varying degrees, included references to Roman Catholicism as a means by which individuals attempted to overcome the senselessness and trauma of warfare. Whether that has been through religious symbols – such as the rosary in Patrick McGill's memoir; a Saint Christopher medal or Scapulars in James Hanley; or prayers said on behalf of Fergus O'Connor in Liam O'Flaherty's *The Black Soul* - the Roman Catholic heritage of all three men has been apparent in each of their works. This is, moreover, regardless of their varying personal views of that religion. Each writer has highlighted in their texts, however, either a loss of faith and/or the extent to which the religious underpinnings to ideologies of duty and heroism were problematized, for death in combat was not a sacrifice akin to that of Christ but merely a waste of life. Indeed, Patrick MacGill offered a symbolic treatment of war in poetry that showed it render Christ 'mute', unable to speak out to stop the conflict. James Hanley, however, went further, and in a different mode, in his re-working of Christ's journey to Calvary and His ultimate crucifixion. The circumstances of both, particularly the latter, may be seen by some as blasphemous given

the shocking details of the author's descriptions. Indeed the text portraying the murder of Otto Reiburg, *The German Prisoner*, was printed privately, quite possibly because Hanley's depictions were so graphic that no mainstream publisher would take it on.

What is significant about the authors' references to Catholicism, and its role in their lives, is firstly, that it forms part of their Irish identity, as at moments religious symbols provide a link to Ireland and home, thereby offering a sense of psychological and emotional escape from their wartime environment. Further, it becomes a means of undermining the rationale for, and continued prosecution of, a war whose beginnings and recruitment strategies were indelibly linked to religion. In Ireland the Church encouraged enlistment as a way of not only helping Catholic Belgium, but also in the hope of securing Home Rule in Ireland after the war. The Irish writers differ from British officers, who largely refrain from any overt mention of religion, even if their upbringing was likely steeped in a tradition of 'muscular Christianity' such as they experienced in the public schools to which they were sent.

Heritage for each of the three Irish soldier-writers is Ireland and it is represented in their texts as a place of psychological sanctuary for the men and women whose work brought them into direct contact with the First World War. Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty were, as indeed were perhaps most soldiers of the British army, in exile when they fought in France. However, each was doubly so, having left home and travelled, to England for MacGill and O'Flaherty, and Hanley to Canada, in order to initially find work, but to then enlist and train before deployment to France. As private soldiers their chance of leave from the frontline was sporadic, or non-existent; the officers being granted more time away from the trenches than those in the ranks. Accordingly home, Ireland, became a country represented in their literature as idyllic, a place of refuge. Liam O'Flaherty is the only writer to portray inter-war Ireland and, in his writing, it is a location of contradiction: the

landscape is, initially, portrayed as that similar to a battlefield. It thereby provides, it has been argued, an environment actually less threatening to a traumatised ex-soldier like Fergus O'Connor because of its similarities with his wartime experiences.

O'Connor is depicted as receiving hostility due to his military service from those who espouse nationalist sympathies. Yet some individuals on the island feel sympathy for O'Connor and, as the seasons change, from Winter through to Summer, so the character's illness subsides and he finds love with a woman who is Roman Catholic - but who also believes in pagan ritual. It is to mythological, ancient Ireland that O'Flaherty turns in order for O'Connor to regain health, to overcome the trauma he suffered in the conflict. O'Flaherty portrays Ireland as a land with a martial past; a country that has, over the centuries, provided many men who have fought as warriors, both on Irish soil and abroad. Neither Patrick MacGill or James Hanley overtly address this aspect of Ireland's history but, through the idea that each author volunteered for service - as did all of the Irishmen they depict, while MacGill includes a brief reference to the poem 'Fontenoy', a work that celebrates the fighting qualities of Irish soldiers from centuries past - there is the suggestion that their texts chime, to an extent, with those of Liam O'Flaherty.

The texts of the three Irish soldier-writers, it has been argued, are more than works depicting the engagement of individuals from Ireland in the conflict: this strain of Irish working class writing connects back in sentiment to work such as James Dawson Burn's *The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy*, and forward to a memoir like Donall Mac Amhlaigh's *An Irish Navy: The Diary of An Exile*. Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty each portray a sense of physicality, everyday violence, privation, brutality and hard manual labour - all of which suffuse the texts mentioned above. There is not the Irish literary working class tradition such as one finds in Britain, due to the lack of heavy industry in Ireland. Yet all of the names mentioned above emigrated to undertake work, regardless of whether that was in

the nineteenth, early or late twentieth centuries. The nature of the tasks working class Irishmen and women were asked to undertake were often similar - be that in peacetime or wartime - and the texts produced reflect those experiences share common themes.

There is a final connection with which the Irish authors considered in this thesis can be viewed: as being within an international European literary working class tradition. Regardless of nationality, one can note a sense of commonality of experience depicted in the war writing of working-class men from France or Germany. The conditions in which they fought, and the place within a military hierarchy of men such as Henri Barbusse, Gabriel Chevallier or Erich Remarque can be viewed as but an extension of the capitalist system in which they were subjugated. This is due to their working class status in peacetime resonating with the texts of the Irish soldiers. In addition men such as Patrick MacGill also wrote of what they perceived to be the imperialist intentions of the British army, and what was for them an additional form of subjugation, colonialism, as men such as Patrick MacGill and James Hanley alluded to the notion that, in their opinion, their home, Ireland, was being ruled by a foreign power.

The texts of the Irish soldiers also connect with war writing rooted in this conflict from further afield, for example Italy and America. Two Italian combatants wrote of their wartime experiences: Emilio Lussu's *Un anno sull'altipiano* (*One Year in the Upland*) (1938) and Attilio Frescura's *Diario di un umboscato* (*Diary of an Ambush*) (1919) each detail their army service on the Italian Front as infantry officers. In addition, three American writers publish texts that can be viewed as war writing: John Dos Passos in his novel *Three Soldiers* (1921), E.E. Cumming in *The Enormous Room* (1922) and Ernest Hemmingway in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) all depict characters who become involved with the First World War. Interestingly, neither Passos, Cummings nor Hemingway served in combat positions: each worked as ambulance drivers. Despite differing roles, a similarity exists between the

American writers and the Italian officers: each man expresses a sense of disillusionment with the conflict in their texts. In a novel such as *Three Soldiers* Passos discredits standard justifications for war, the horrors of battle destroy faith in the reasons why men were sent to battle, a process similarly discussed in this thesis in relation to Patrick MacGill, James Hanley and Liam O'Flaherty.

In conclusion this thesis adds to the body of academic research of not only the First World War but also Irish literary studies because, as has been demonstrated, the three Irish soldier-writers wrote of their experiences in a manner that differentiates them from the established canon of British First World War authors, especially as represented by officers such as Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden. There is an immediacy, vividness and breadth of experience to the Irish texts that is less apparent in the officers' writing, although that is not to diminish in any way the bravery of those men who led the soldiers. The officers' texts have formed the cornerstone to many people's understanding of life on the Western Front. Nevertheless it has been the intention of this thesis to examine and understand the experiences of a group of men and women who have, to a large degree, been overlooked at home and abroad, and who were connected to the conflict: those who were Irish, Roman Catholic and working class. Should the National Library of Ireland, Dublin ever curate another exhibition of the First World War, as they did in 2015, perhaps an amended title could be suggested: 'Portraits of the Visible: faces of Irish men and women from WWI'.

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